



got a part in a movie in 1986. I call it *The* N^*gga *They Couldn't Kill* — he raped a white woman and they tried to electrocute him but it didn't work... And I called Sidney [Poitier] and said 'Man, they offered me \$600,000 for *The* N^*gga *They Couldn't Kill!*' And

he told me 'the first two or three or four films you do in this business will dictate how you're perceived.' I turned it down and six months later I got Cry Freedom."

This quote is from a 2010 interview for TimesTalk.

Cry Freedom was the breakout for Denzel Haves Washington Jr. but it was actually his fourth theatrical feature film. His first had come six years prior, after a couple of TV bit-parts and before he landed his regular slot on hospital drama St Elsewhere. 1981's Carbon Copy sees Washington costarring with George Segal and directed by Michael Schultz, a black filmmaker and more recently a TV stalwart on shows such as Brothers and Sisters, Arrow and Black-ish. Back then. Schultz specialised in films like 1977's Car Wash in which Richard Pryor heads a multiracial ensemble charting a chaotic day-in-thelife of an LA car wash facility. It's a comedy with an edge of social comment, and Carbon Copy also fits this bill. Washington plays Roger Porter, who reveals himself as son of the wealthy, successful (white) Walter Whitney (Segal). The wacky results become more

sober and incisive as the story unfolds. But the film is dated, and the sexist portrayal of Whitney's rapacious white wife blunts its progressive credentials. It's hard to tell if Whitney turns his back on his riches to forge a relationship with his black son out of newfound paternal affection or simply to escape the vacuity of his old loveless lifestyle, to which he is now "woke".

However, Washington is supremely at ease, affable and charismatic. His effortless savoir faire may even work to the film's detriment: the twist at the end is that Roger is not the illeducated, no-hoper street kid Whitney first believes him to be, but a second year pre-med student at his father's own alma mater who took time out from his studies to teach Dad a much

needed life lesson about judging by appearances.

Problem is, Washington's sophisticated aura of watchful, ironic intelligence is so palpable that there's no moment at which we do not understand that Roger is playing a trick on Whitney. Hence no surprise when the reveal occurs.

But what's even more striking about this debut lead is how, maybe more than any that came after, it neatly correlates to the stardom that Washington was on the verge of achieving. Here the then-progressive agenda is that a black man could be seen as capable of succeeding within a society whose edifices are temples of blinding whiteness. A more modern viewer might desire to critique those institutions more radically than Carbon Copy ever does. But this is the social crucible in which Denzel Washington, the movie star, was forged. For context, consider that Carbon Copy premiered when TV shows like Diff'rent Strokes and Benson were in their heyday (both representations of blackness played for fish-out-of-water laughs by placing it in a white context), years before even The Cosby Show first aired, and a full decade before the wealthy family that Will Smith moved in with in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air were themselves allowed to be black.

The model established by Poitier in his quote taken from Washington's unusually candid *TimesTalk* interview, films like *Carbon Copy, A Soldier's Story* and *Cry Freedom*, for better, for worse, for richer, for blander, have dictated how Washington has been perceived ever since. And those films were products of their times – times which have a-changed. Meanwhile, the conception of Washington as a public figure has remained defiantly stable.

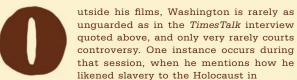


ASCENT

JOE MILLER







the company of some Jewish people - even the audience in attendance seems unsure how to react until he reassures them. Another is when he reportedly blew up at Quentin Tarantino on the set of Crimson Tide over Tarantino's nervous-reflex-like tendency to sprinkle his script rewrites with racial epithets. And he became the unwitting eye of a minor firestorm when one of the leaked Sony emails suggested that the proportionately disappointing overseas box office for his 2014 film The Equalizer proved that the international audience was "racist." While the producer in question was at David Brent-ian pains to clarify that he himself was not being racist ("I personally think Denzel Washington is the best actor of his generation.") he did implicitly urge the Sony powers-that-were to reconsider casting African-American leads in general, and Washington in particular, in that type of film. Simply as a matter of savvy business strategy. Advice, incidentally, clearly not taken: The Magnificent Seven is a Sony production and The Equalizer is on track for a sequel.

Beyond those isolated incidents, Washington has maintained an image of charming, good-guy decency that's so impermeable as to be double

Teflon-coated. It's hard to find anyone with a bad word to say about him – with the exception of actor Bronson Pinchot whose assessment of his *Courage Under Fire* co-star at the *AV Club* ("one of the most unpleasant human beings I've ever met in my life") is as scathing as it is unique. Far more often you hear co-stars and collaborators extolling Washington's professional and personal excellence – from Spike Lee insisting

he's, "the greatest actor of all time, period" to Tom Hanks first calling out his *Philadelphia* co-star who "shone because of his integrity" at the Oscars, and more recently introducing him at the Golden Globes as an "artist who defines the times we all live in."

Washington comes across in interviews as a humble man almost embarrassed by his own magnetism, with an immense talent for which he is grateful to God (he is a devout Pentecostal Christian who reads from the Bible daily). And his distinctly un-Hollywood lifestyle, long marriage and private politics (aside from a spell as an outspoken Obama champion during the 2008 campaign) certainly haven't contradicted that image. In fact he's been on-message almost to a fault, as though his fame has a script from which he never strays too far. Some of his favourite aphorisms seem to weave their way in and out of interviews, films and public appearances to the point of white noise.

> The quote, "You'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse," for example, a riff on "you can't take it with you," appears in his 2006 book 'A Hand To Guide Me'; in the January 2008 issue of O Magazine during an interview with Oprah; in 2009's The Taking of Pelham 123 (spoken by Washington's character); in a January 2010 press junket; twice at a May 2014 talk to acting students; and it forms a central tenet of his 2015 commencement address to the graduates of Dillard University. It's clear Washington takes

his responsibility as a role model too seriously for careless off-the-cuffness, but it also feels like an offshoot of a more classical, codified approach to stardom than our spontaneously confessional age, all snapchats and selfies and embarrassingly emoji-laden tweets, tends to promote. There's a reason why there aren't too many Denzel Washington memes, and it can't be that he's never looked sad while eating a sandwich.



PERSONA

MALCOLMX









ovie journalists and film commentators have tried to define the essence of Washington's stardom. Film historian Cynthia Baron, who literally wrote the book on Washington (part of the BFI 'Star Studies' series), invokes a new kind of "Hollywood stardom [that] no longer requires a link with whiteness."

But Baron also relates Washington's pioneering achievements to a cinematic tradition of yore, summoning Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Fred Astaire and Cary Grant as comparison points. Similarly, in 2014, Variety's Brent Lang wrote an article titled 'Why Denzel Washington May Be the Last Pure Movie Star.' Its tone is wholly admiring but it doesn't take a genius to extrapolate a downside to being described as such: that the era in which his star persona naturally fits is passing.

So Washington is both pioneer and throwback, both the first and the last. And that's something he is aware of. Talking to *The Guardian* in 2013, he said, "Being African-American, there were no big movie stars to hang out with anyway, not when I was starting out, they were just the third guy from the back!

For whatever reason, I never befriended any white actors." It sounds like a lonely position to be in, a star forging his own path just slightly ahead of the wave that would follow soon after. Timing is everything, and Washington was picking up his first Oscar (an obvious marker for mainstream acceptance) for the Ed Zwick-directed, white-mediated 1989 film *Glory*, just a few months after future collaborator Spike Lee released black cinema touchpoint *Do The Right Thing*, and around a year before John Singleton's *Boyz N The Hood* hit screens.

With no stardom template to follow, it's hardly surprising that Washington controlled his public image so carefully. Which also means that interviewers often seem universated for the frank forceful

Washington that occasionally shows up. Roger Ebert interviewed him around the time of his outstanding turn in *Malcolm X* and wrote warmly that, "What was surprising for me, talking to him, was how political he was – how willing to continue the discussion that Malcolm X begins in the film." Yet in that same interview Washington claims, "I don't speak for my work; I like to let my work speak for me."

More recently, in that 2013 *Guardian* piece, Xan Brooks makes a point of stressing the disconnect between the *Flight*era Washington he meets – "talking up a blizzard, he's talking to keep warm; spouting off in great, rousing, charming gusts," and the Washington he probably expected, a megastar by any standard, yet one who you "could probably walk past [...] in the street without so much as a backward glance." Again, even there, the interview ends with Washington, having effortlessly charmed and disarmed with the full force of his personal magnetism, calling out as an afterthought: "What's a celebrity anyway? Paris Hilton's a celebrity. I'm just a working actor."

o what does the work say about Denzel Washington? On the one hand his filmography promotes the idea of him as a star of rare integrity: can you think of any other A-lister without a single sequel or franchise to his name? (Even if that changes with *The Equalizer 2*, it

was an unprecedented 35-year streak). Even Tom Hanks, whose own fame and likeable everyman persona probably most closely correlate to a "white version" of Washington's, has gone back to the *Da Vinci Code* well a couple of times now and has voiced three *Toy Story* movies. Washington hasn't ever gone the family film route, has never voiced a feature animation and, in the years since *Carbon Copy*, has appeared in exactly two comedies: *The Preacher's Wife* from 1996 and 1990's forgotten, raciallymotivated organ transplant farce, *Heart Condition*.

What makes Washington's stardom so unusual is that, for better or worse, it is predicated on the kind of grown-up dramas people like to complain that Hollywood doesn't make anymore. And unlike, say, erstwhile co-star Samuel L Jackson, Washington does not take supporting roles in big-budget blockbusters: he'd

rather lead a smaller film. This sets limits. Washington has never been a huge moneyspinner in the manner of Tom Cruise – only five of his films have made more than \$100m in the US, and his best performer – Ridley Scott's *American Gangster* – tapped out at \$130m domestically.

It has also proven something of a creative limitation. Outside of the four films Washington has made with Spike Lee, and a handful of others that distinguish themselves for other reasons, there are an awful lot of rather samey filler titles: Ricochet, 2 Guns, Virtuosity, John Q, Out of Time, The Book of Eli, The

Pelican Brief, The Taking of Pelham 123, Deja Vu, The Bone Collector... Some of those films are pretty good for what they are, but memorable star vehicles they are not. The inexplicably popular Man on Fire is probably the paradigm there, but those traits carry all the way up to 2014's The Equalizer and, probably, beyond.

The heavy-lifting, capital-P performances can mostly be found in the other strand of Washington's career to date: the portraits of real-life historical figures. From anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom* to Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter in *The Hurricane* and fictionalised Pvt Trip in *Glory* to antihero Frank Lucas in *American Gangster*, these are the turns that established his practically trademarked reputation as one of the best actors of his generation. But they also suggest he's one of the most classical, to the point of old-fashioned, as they all belong to the "inspirational true-life story" category that has, for so long, been the Hollywood establishment's idea of acceptable prestige. Add to that heady mix the slightly anomalous Oscar win for the more generic *Training Day*, and you have a good idea of the bullseye area of his mainstream appeal.

"In a just world, the sadly underrated Devil in a Blue Dress would have kicked off Washington's first franchise."



















ike many masterpieces, Spike Lee's Malcolm X was not immediately recognised as such. And maybe it's to be expected that the (predominantly white, if it needs to be said again) establishment would have a hard time wholly embracing a biopic of the most divisive of black icons, coming from the outspoken director of the powder keg street opera, Do the Right Thing. But while the epic yet humane scope of Lee's achievement might have taken some time to sink in, Washington's Oscar-nominated performance was lauded straight away. And he is unmistakably brilliant, from his wolfish grin and Rufus T Firefly walk during the riotous, zootsuited quasi-musical opening, to the convincing portrayal of X's religious conversion and subsequent radicalisation as part of the Nation of Islam, to the eventual, quieter revelations after his trip to Mecca.

This part also acted as an unspoken rebuke to the other, better-known side of his star persona. As Ashley Clark, writing for *The Guardian*, put it: "Lee's film was a powerful statement against an entertainment culture which routinely prioritised the experience of white saviours in civil rights narratives (see: *Cry Freedom, Mississippi Burning*), or sweetened the bitter pill with soothing depictions of interracial friendships (*The Long Walk Home*)."

And yet, even while they may not have been the film's primary audience, Washington's performance humanises Malcolm X for white American viewers too. In his skilled, multifaceted turn, Malcolm is neither the infallible idol his supporters saw nor the crazy-mirror boogeyman version of Martin Luther King Jr that mainstream culture was coached to view him as. Washington renders Malcolm X as a man, and if it isn't his absolute greatest performance, it very well might be his most lastingly important.



MASTERPIECE





ee didn't only get one great performance out of Washington, he got four. Their collaborations -Malcolm X, Mo' Better Blues, He Got Game and Inside Man - amount to a separate sub-category of excellence within Washington's extensive catalogue. Maybe it's because other regular collaborators like Tony Scott and Antoine Fugua, employ Washington as a star, whereas Lee employs him as an actor. The characters portrayed in each of Lee's films do not fit the mould of the man's-gotta-do archetype Washington plays over and over again elsewhere. This is perhaps best exemplified by his perfectly nuanced turn as the convict father trying, and largely failing, to connect with his son for reasons both noble and ignoble in the tremendous He Got Game (this one might well be his actual greatest performance). Lee is one of the few directors to give him roles that do not rely on his charisma - in fact they require him to tamp it down in service of a

It's that approach that makes *Malcolm X* feel less like a hagiography than a sympathetic eye-level account of history as lived by people, not icons. And it lends even their most commercial film, *Inside Man*, the texture and sly wit of a character piece, disguised as a fun cat-and-mouse heist thriller.

deeper truth about real, convincingly broken men.

Washington seems to trust Lee with narratives in which his character loses in a way he perhaps doesn't with any other director. Tellingly, his two biggest regrets, as he told GO in 2012, are turning down two films that presented a similarly more complex idea of 'winning' and 'losing' than the more generic fare he often accepts: the Brad Pitt role in David Fincher's horror-thriller Se7en and the George Clooney role in corporate psychodrama Michael Clayton. Of the latter he admitted frankly, "It was the best material I had read in a long time, but I was nervous about a first-time director, and I was wrong. It happens."

And the four Lee films are not the only notable outliers in Washington's filmography. There was his genuinely difficult role as the homophobic lawyer in Jonathan Demme's Philadelphia which Tom Hanks rightly said, "really put his film image at risk." His two films with director Carl Franklin, Out of Time and Devil in a Blue Dress, also showcased a different conception of Washington's appeal: a sleazier, sexier side, involving probably the most graphic sex scenes the usually clean-cut star ever engaged in. In a just world, the sadly underrated Devil in a Blue Dress would have kicked off Washington's first franchise: the Easy Rawlins books by Walter Mosley were ready and waiting and never had Washington (and indeed Don Cheadle as Mouse) more perfectly slid into a character.

n a very brilliant *Literary Hub* piece on Harper Lee's changing legacy, Kate Jenkins says that, "sometime between the publication of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and, let's say, the invention of Twitter, white Americans got the strange idea that ours was a "post-racial" society." Washington became a star during this era and his stardom, which has been remarkable for its consistency and unchangeability over decades of ceaseless work, feels like part of that post-racial dream. But we now live in 'Go Set a Watchman' times, when the comforting paternalism of Atticus Finch is revealed to have been a kind of condescending racism all along and when the very term "post-racial" is most usually accompanied by the word "myth".

Washington did an amazing, unequalled job of becoming a Hollywood star (which, let's not forget, is a mainstream – read white – construct) when the odds were wildly stacked against him. Rather like the "Ginger Rogers paradox" for women (Rogers did everything her better-paid co-star

Fred Astaire did, only backwards and in heels), in order to achieve an equivalent level of fame and influence, Washington had not

only to be better at his job than most of his white counterparts, he had to be personally unimpeachable on every level: God-fearing, morally incorruptible, unquestionably respectable, a paragon of virtue. And that's from a mainstream perspective. From the point of view of his standing within his own community, the stakes were even higher. As Chris Rock put it, "being famous as a black guy is a little different than being famous as a white guy. Tom Hanks is an amazing actor, but Denzel Washington is a god to his people.

He has a responsibility to his people that Tom Cruise, Liam Neeson, all these guys don't have. They just make their art."

Washington successfully negotiated all that for decades, with a grace that, to a casual observer, could easily seem so effortless as to be practically transparent. But now that he has set his mark on Hollywood history as surely as his handprints have been immortalised in cement outside the Chinese Theatre in LA (extreme left of the entrance, between Danny Glover, Walter Matthau, Michael Keaton, Susan Sarandon and Oskar Werner, if you're curious) he has license, if he wants it, to change, to experiment, maybe even to subvert his image to give audiences black and white more opportunities to say (as he told The Telegraph in 2013), "we haven't seen Denzel like that." He can take immense pride and is owed a massive debt of gratitude for taking on the mantle of "the last pure movie star" with such intelligence and integrity. But it would be exciting now to see him evolve into the first of something else - to see Denzel Washington, at 61, re-redefine what it means to be Hollywood's brightest black star 🚯

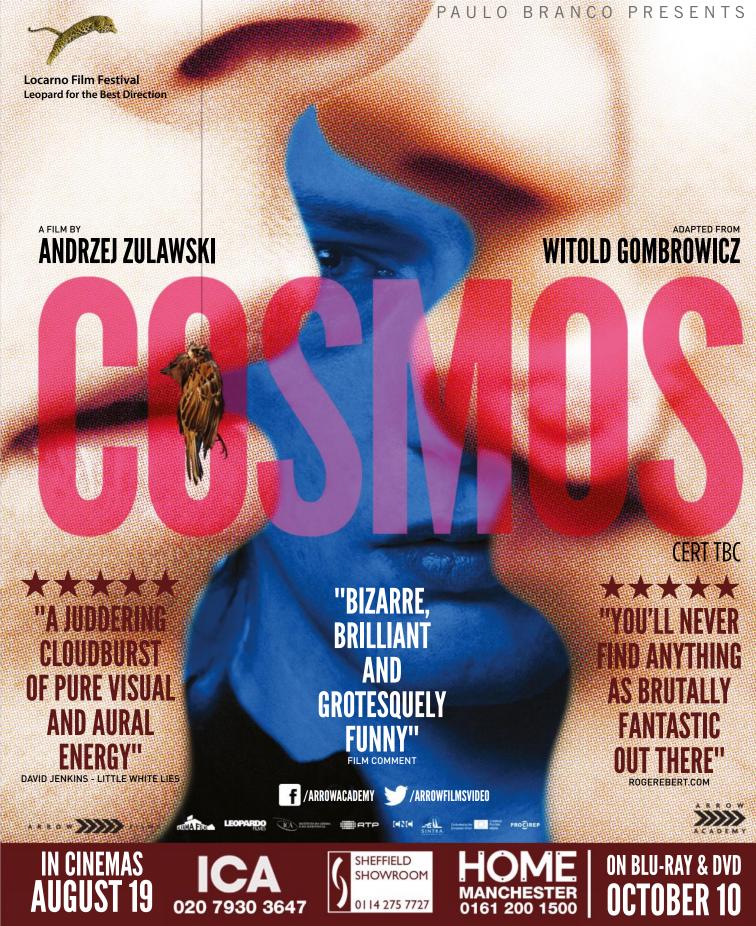












As told to Adam Woodward - Illustration by Laurène Boglio



Antoine Fuqua on Denzel Washington

Back in February 1998, *Premiere* magazine ran a cover story about commercial directors who had successfully moved into movies. A group shot of Michael Bay, David Fincher, Simon West, Dominic Sena and Antoine Fuqua was accompanied by the somewhat hyperbolic headline: 'Do these men represent the future of Hollywood filmmaking – or the death of it?' Linking them was the now defunct Propaganda Films, which produced, among other titles, Bay's *Armageddon*, Fincher's *The Game*, West's *Con Air*, Sena's *Gone in Sixty Seconds* and Fuqua's *The Replacement Killers*. Some months later, Pauletta Washington remembered the magazine cover and showed it to her husband around the time he and screenwriter David Ayer were searching for someone to helm a project called *Training Day*. She had seen *The Replacement Killers* and recommended it to Denzel, who was impressed enough to set up a meeting with Fuqua. Here, the director reflects on how his relationship with *The Magnificent Seven* star blossomed during that initial collaboration, and offers his take on what makes Washington such an enduring, irresistible screen icon.

remember my first day on set with Denzel. By this point we had talked about the script [for Training Day] a bunch of times, and I felt like we had a pretty good understanding of each other. We were on the same wavelength in terms of

where we wanted to take the project. But when the relationship was really cemented for me was in the beginning, on the first day of filming. We were shooting the scene in the diner, and I walk over to Denzel – and you have to remember, I'd started to feel like I knew the guy, but to me Denzel is like Michael Jordan – and ask him if he wants to come over to look at the monitors. He goes, 'Well, you good?' I go, 'Yeah,' he goes, 'Great. I don't need to see it then. Call me when you need me.' And he walked away. Two things happened in that moment: number one, this guy trusts me; and number two, this guy trusts me – don't fuck it up. He puts so much trust into the director and it was interesting for me because

he honestly didn't look at the monitor, at all. He would just look to me at the end of each take and if I was happy that was good enough for him. Me and him were like two jazz musicians just riffing off each other – and it remained that way throughout the entire movie.

"Denzel is different. You can't treat him like he's just another actor because the truth is he's not. You work with everyone differently, of course, and you have different relationships with different actors. The most important thing I learned when working with Denzel was to respect his process. He's a very smart, thoughtful actor. I call him the logic monster. If you don't have a reason behind something, Denzel's not going to do it. He'll challenge you on things that he just doesn't believe in, unless you have an explanation for it that makes sense and clicks. But he's very giving and open. He's a great leader, someone who leads from behind. Sometimes I would watch him do that. The key thing was never tying his hands. I always left room – both within the frame and within the framework - for him to find freedom and try other things. For example, the whole "King Kong ain't got shit on me" thing - that part of the speech wasn't written. I could see sometimes where these things were going, or I could see the energy, and it was always important to feel like I was in tune with him so I could be where I needed to be with my camera once I'd set up the shot,

"We kept in touch after that, I'd see him at the house sometimes or we'd go for dinner. But it wasn't until much later that we got to work together again, on The Equalizer. We had a great time making that movie together, and when MGM approached me with the idea of remaking The Magnificent Seven, Denzel was the first person who came to mind. I read the script, and they really did a good job in terms of getting all the DNA of the story in there. But when we started going down the list of actors

to capture what he's giving you. Because

Denzel will give you everything.

it felt like we were just going through the usual suspects. Now, I knew I wanted Denzel at this point, but I'd decided to keep my cards close to my chest. I felt like it needed something more, like the casting had to be an event in itself. So we were having a meeting, the producers and I, and I said, 'What about Denzel Washington? Denzel would be amazing on a horse...' It was one of those moments where the room fell completely silent. Eventually someone said, 'Do you think you could get him to do it?' Honestly, I had no idea, but I knew I could at least speak to him about it. So I arranged a lunch with him in New York and Denzel, his daughter and I met up and I pitched him the idea. He started laughing because he knows how much I love westerns. Immediately we talked about Seven Samurai, and I started describing to him how I saw it and he agreed to think about. So I knew there and then he was intrigued by the idea. He went away and read the script and then called me and said. 'Are MGM really going to do this?' and I said, 'Well, yeah...'

"Once he started getting into it you could tell he was really excited. When he started putting his guns and his

holster on, he wouldn't take it off. He

started immediately going and riding horses and all that. It was amazing. And I started getting excited about it because I realised how much I wanted to see Denzel on a horse. The thing for me is, the west has always been one way, it's always had one look. I wanted to challenge that and do something contemporary, because I think that's one of the issues with westerns. I wanted something that looked and felt more diverse, like the world we live in today. He'll always tell me in advance if there's anything he wants to do with a character – on The Equalizer, for example, he wanted to shave his head. So we'd talk about that stuff and I would watch it evolve. The first thing we talked about on The Magnificent Seven was sideburns. We were at the Mayweather-Pacquiao fight in Vegas a couple of years ago, and we discussed

fight in Vegas a couple of years ago, and we discussed the fact he wanted to grow sideburns and how long they were going to be.

"Denzel is a movie star. He doesn't like that - he would rather be known as an actor's actor, which is totally right because he loves theatre and that's where his heart is. Ask him about it and I guarantee he'll tell you that he's an actor, and when he's working he's a working actor and when he's not working he's an unemployed actor. It says a lot about who Denzel is as a person, because you'll never see him wearing expensive watches or anything fancy. The whole flash Hollywood thing, that's not him. He's not in the business for that. He just loves acting. But the thing with Denzel is, he's a movie star. He's tall, he's powerful, he's handsome, he's charming, he's highly intelligent, he has this booming voice and he has that deep, deep emotion as a person. And when he smiles he lights up the room. If you're two rooms down and he starts laughing you know it's Denzel. There's not a lot of guys like that left, guys that have the full package. He's a true movie star in that sense. And another thing, my God, the camera loves him. There's magic you only see when you get to editing room, these little things that you didn't even notice on set. And that's why you have to give him room to do his thing, because he'll always give you more if you do." 🚳



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AN OF

Roaring guns! Darting horses! Sizzling action!

IN CELEBRATION OF A SHINY NEW VERSION OF ICONIC WESTERN THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, WE DIVE DEEP INTO A GENRE WHICH IS SO MUCH MORE THAN OVERDRESSED DUDES MOSEYING ON THE PRAIRIE AND DISPENSING DOWN-HOME JUSTICE WITH THEIR LOCKED AND LOADED SIX-SHOOTERS.



AMERICA

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS SEEN IN THE FILMS OF JOHN FORD.

WORDS BY NICK PINKERTON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY OLIVER STAFFORD

Ford made Westerns and much else besides. He made a great many period films, not a single work that speculated on the future, and a few pictures that were about as contemporary as you could get, shooting documentary footage under fire during the Battle of Midway and re-enacting then-recent fighting in the Philippines with freshly-decommissioned Navy Elco PT boats in Key West Florida, for 1945's They Were Expendable. His period pictures, as well as his contemporary subjects, are

prismatic objects, reflecting something of their maker, something of the era they represent, and something of the time in which they were made. So 1939's Stagecoach, with its pettifogging varlet banker and establishment "saved from the blessings of civilization" kicker, may seem very much a movie of the Depression, while My Darling Clementine from 1946, released only a few years later and likewise set in the Southwest in the early 1880s, is a product of postwar victory culture, and takes the merits of civilization very seriously indeed.

YOUR KEY TO THE JOHN FORD MAP OF AMERICA

- 1. Drums Along the Mohawk (1939)

 Mohawk Valley, New York 1776-77
 - 2. The World Moves On (1934)

 New Orleans 1825/1914
 - 3a/b. Young Mr. Lincoln (1939)
 New Salem and Springfield,
 Illinois 1858?
 - 4. How the West Was Won: The Civil War (1962) Shiloh... 1861-65
- 5a/b. The Horse Soldiers (1959) ↑ Newton's Station to Baton Rouge, Mississippi - 1863
 - 6a/6b. The Prisoner of Shark Island (1936) ♥ Southern Maryland to Dry Tortugas - 1865-1869
- 7. The Searchers (1956)

 West Texas, New Mexico 1868-1873
- 8. The Iron Horse (1924)
 Promontory Summit, Utah 1869
- 10a/b/c. Fort Apache (1948)

 ▼ (Little Bighorn) Fort Apache (Actual)
 Arizona side, Monument Valley;
 Corriganville Movie Ranch, Simi
 Valley. California 1876
- 11. She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949)
 Fort Starke (Actual) Monument
 Valley, Navajo reservation on
 Arizona-Utah border 1876
 - **12. 3 Bad Men (1926) ♥** Custer, Dakota Territory 1877
 - 13a/b. Cheyenne Autumn (1964)
 Oklahoma Territory to
 the Dakotas 1878
 - 14a/b. Rio Grande (1950) Texas, Mexico - 1879
- 15a/b. Stagecoach (1939)

 ▼ Tonto, Arizona Territory to Lordsburg,
 New Mexico Territory 1880
 - 16. My Darling Clementine (1946)

 Tombstone, Arizona 1882
 - 17a/b. Wagon Master (1950)

 ♥ "Crystal City" to San Juan
 River, Utah 1880s
 - 18. Two Rode Together (1961) Texas (Actual) Alamo Village, Bracketville, TX - 1880s?
 - 19. Sergeant Rutledge (1960)

 (Actual) Monument

 Valley, Utah LATE 1880s

- 20. Judge Priest (1934)

 An Old Kentucky Town 1890
- 21. Steamboat Round the Bend (1935)

 Wississippi River 1890s?
 - 22. The Long Gray Line (1955)

 West Point, New York 1898-1948?
 - 23. The Sun Shines Bright (1953)
 Pairfield, Kentucky 1905
 - 24. What Price Glory (1952)

 France 1917
 - 25. Submarine Patrol (1938) Atlantic Ocean - 1917-18
 - 26a/b. Pilgrimage (1933)

 ↑ Three Cedars, Arkansas
 to France 1917-1933
 - The Wings of Eagles (1957)
 - 27. The Quiet Man (1952)
 Pittsburgh to Ireland 1920s
 - 28a/b. The Grapes of Wrath (1940)

 Oklahoma to California 1930
 - 29. Tobacco Road (1941)

 Georgia 1933
 - 30. Doctor Bull (1933)

 Connecticut 1933
 - 7 Women (1966) China - 1935
- 31a/b/c. The Long Voyage Home (1940)

 West Indies to Baltimore
 to England 1939?
 - 32. December 7th (1943)
 Pearl Harbor, Hawaii 1941
- 34. They Were Expendable (1945)
 Philippines 1941-42
- 35. The Battle of Midway (1942)

 Midway Island 1942
- 36. Torpedo Squadron (1942)

 Midway Island 1942
- 37. Mister Roberts (1955)

 Pacific Backwaters -1944-45?
- 38. The Last Hurrah (1958)

 Boston, Massachusetts 1958
- 39. Donovan's Reef (1963)

 Haleakaloha, French Polynesia 1963

TURN OVERLEAF TO VIEW ILLUSTRATED MAP







Itogether, the sum of Ford's cinematic output between 1917, when he made his debut movie, and 1970, when he made his last, a documentary tribute to Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Lewis Burwell "Chesty" Puller, make up an abridged history of the United States of America from the brink of Independence to the emergence of military-industrial superpower. Ford's American chronicle is admittedly rather light on material pre-dating the Civil War, and in this he follows the pattern of American movies as a whole, for whom the nation's history essentially begins at the Battle of Bull Run in July of 1861.

The first exception, and one of the handful of creditable Revolutionary War films, is 1939's Drums Along the Mohawk, based loosely on events in the Saratoga campaign and particularly the Battle of Oriskany in 1777. (Some of the same raw historical material was used in DW Griffith's 1924 film, America.) A prologue set on a New Orleans plantation in the year 1825 begins 1934's The World Moves On, a generationsspanning drama which follows the fortunes of a multinational family corporation for over a century, ending with the rise of fascism in Europe. This is one of a few occasions on which Ford would cover multiple epochs in a single film, though elsewhere he would limit his perspective to that of a single personage: Irish-American West Point athletics instructor Marty Maher (Tyrone Power) in 1955's The Long Grey Line, or aviator-cum-screenwriter Frank "Spig" Wead (John Wayne) in The Wings of Eagles from 1957. Both films are concerned with martial history before and after the two world wars.



Chronologically the last and certainly not least of Ford's pre-Civil War outings is Young Mr Lincoln – like Drums Along the Mohawk produced in 1939. Inasmuch as there was ever a vogue for Whig-era subjects, it was in the years before World War Two, the years of Henry King's nostalgia cycle and Victor Fleming's The Farmer Takes a Wife (from 1935), when America looked yearningly to a bucolic past imagined to be simpler than the present conundrum. For whatever reason these movies frequently starred Henry Fonda, who played Honest Abe for Ford in the years before he became conscious of his great destiny, striding off as the film closes towards a gathering storm whose significance is all too clear. "FORD CHRONICLED EVERY STAGE
OF HIS COUNTRY'S GROWING PAINS
FROM THE MOMENT IT FIRST
STRUCK OUT ON ITS OWN TO ITS
BUMPTIOUS EARLY ADULTHOOD TO
THE HARD-FOUGHT INTERNATIONAL
VINDICATION THAT FOLLOWED
PEARL HARBOUR."

In constructing this timeline it has been necessary to take liberties, as Mr Ford and his screenwriters routinely took liberties with history – a process which was one of Ford's great themes, famously crystallised in 1962's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The events depicted in *Young Mr Lincoln* have generally been connected to the case of William "Duff" Armstrong, who Lincoln defended when he was accused of murder in 1858. In the film, however, Lincoln is not yet married (he was wed in 1842), nor is he anything like the seasoned politician (and former representative) that he would at that point have been.

Other historical films lack any single clear inspiration. Fort Apache from 1948 depicts the US cavalry being handed a calamitous defeat by the Apache under Cochise thanks to the overweening arrogance of Fonda's Lt Col Owen Thursday. Rather than any actual event, the film was based on a short story by the western writer James Warner Bellah, who was stitching together details of Fetterman's Fight (1866) and the Battle of Little Bighorn (1876). In order to strike on a date, you can split the difference between the two, which seems to account for the still-palpable proximity to the Civil War in the film, as well as the presence of a belligerent Cochise, who negotiated peace in 1872 and died in 1874. A geographical setting is tricky to determine: the "New England city" where Spencer Tracy's back-slapping mayor is running for a fifth term in 1958's The Last Hurrah is never identified, but the clear models are Boston and its long-serving Irish-American Mayor James Michael Curley, and so Beantown it is.

The Last Hurrah is an oddity in Ford's filmography. He was an easterner – from about as far east as you could get, in fact, raised in the coastal city of Portland, Maine – but he rarely depicted the big, old cities of the seaboard, with 1933's Doctor Bull, set in a small Connecticut town and starring archetypal Oklahoman Will Rogers, his lone other attempt at a New England setting. His films would tarry on some occasions in the Southeast – both Judge Priest from 1934 and The Sun Shines Bright from 1953 were based on Kentucky-set stories by Irvin S Cobb – while he never bothered with the Midwest, unless we count the Ohio Valley-set bits of his contribution to 1962 omnibus film How the West Was Won, which goes on to depict the Battle of Shiloh.



Along with 1959's The Horse Soldiers, the events of which are based on a Union cavalry raid during the Vicksburg campaign, this was the only occasion on which Ford portrayed the Civil War itself. Its aftershocks, however, are felt in several of his films, in some cases quite directly - The Prisoner of Shark Island from 1936, for example, is a speculative fiction based on the trial and imprisonment of Dr Samuel Mudd, the Maryland doctor who set the broken leg of a fugitive John Wilkes Booth. More frequently, however, the war was a troubling memory for the men now opening up new fronts in the territory out west of the Mississippi River: for Lt Col Thursday, goaded by his underperformance in the late war, or for the unreconstructed Reb Ethan Edwards of 1956's The Searchers. And it was out West, where divisions were put aside to get to the business of taming wilderness and conducting the Indian Wars, where Ford made his most celebrated work.



Some of Ford's Westerns were tagged to real, dateable events: the meeting of the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah (1924's The Iron Horse), the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (My Darling Clementine), and the Northern Cheyenne Exodus of 1878-79 (1964's Cheyenne Autumn). Others occurred in a true-enough west of historical composite and popular fiction, of place names that sounded right even if you'd have trouble locating them on a map, like the "Crystal City" of 1950's Wagon Master or the "Welcome, Arizona" of 1948's 3 Godfathers. This geographical confusion was further intensified by Ford's tendency to return to favourite locations - Monument Valley, where he shot nine films beginning with Stagecoach, in the heart of the Navajo Nation on the Arizona-Utah border using them to stand in for whatever western locality his latest horse opera happened to take place in.

Ford had first arrived in the West in 1914, following his big brother, star actor-director Francis, who five years earlier had begun making the first generation of western-shot Westerns using real-life cowboys with Star Film Co. in San Antonio, Texas. By the time brother John's career got into full swing the West had well and truly been won, though he would find a modern equivalent to the overland pioneers in the California-bound Okies and the Joad family of 1940's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Otherwise, with a few noted exceptions, Ford showed no great interest in the goings-on of the settled United States, and most of his more-or-less contemporary-set pictures with American subjects caught up with them at new frontiers scattered around the wider world. In several films it's the fronts of the world wars; in 1952's The Quiet Man, it's a Pittsburgher repatriating to Inisfree, Ireland; in 1966's Seven Women, the frontier is pushed clear west all the way to China. Ford's only film actually set in the 1960s, Donovan's Reef from 1963, takes place in a kind of Neverland of arrested American adolescence, a hideaway in French Polynesia where two old US Navy salts, Donovan and Gilhooley (John Wayne and Lee Marvin), meet every year on December 7th to ceremoniously knock the stuffing out of one another, and where Donovan has holed up to keep clear of the galloping hypocrisy that has infected his uptight and prosperous native land.

Ford chronicled every stage of his country's growing pains from the moment it first struck out on its own to its bumptious early adulthood to the hard-fought international vindication that followed Pearl Harbour. But there's little to suggest that he, any more than Donovan, was interested in its self-satisfied middle-age in the era of Levittowns and Gray Flannel Suits or whatever other shorthand you prefer for the Eisenhower era. His heart was with Wayne's antique cowboy Tom Doniphon in Liberty Valence; with the hard-nosed, obsolescent street-Irish ward-heeler of The Last Hurrah: the vanguished, beleaguered Native Americans of Cheyenne Autumn; and the boozy drop-outs of Donovan's Reef - which makes this stout Maine Republican sound appallingly hippie-ish. The Homer and Herodotus of the American screen with more than a dash of Irish blarney, Ford was saved from the blessings of civilisation in 1973. We haven't seen his likes 'round these parts since 🚷





IS FOR .

BARROOMS

A FOUR-STOP TOUR
OF WILD WEST BAR ROOMS.

WORDS BY SOPHIE YAPP
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON NGAI

BROWN'S HOLE

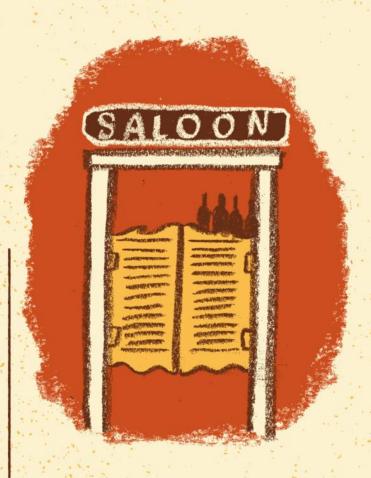
WYOMING-COLORADO-UTAH BORDER STILL SERVING: NO

Featured in William Wiard's Tom Horn (starring a haggard but soulful Steve McQueen), and also a onetime haven for outlaws such as Butch Cassidy, Brown's Hole was one of the first social venues to be referred to as a "saloon" when it was established in 1822. It was renowned for its catering and became a stop-over spot for fur traders. It now takes the name of Brown's Park, the location for a national wildlife refuge.

LONG BRANCH SALOON

DODGE CITY, KANSAS STILL SERVING: YES

Including Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday among its regular patrons, it was known as Miss Kitty's Long Branch Saloon Bar in the western television series Gunsmoke. Opened in the early 1870s, the original saloon was burnt down in a forest fire in 1885. It has, however, since been revived on the site of the Boot Hill Museum and now serves an array of cowboy-inspired drinks and tourist-attracting live girly floor shows.



NEW SHERIDAN BAR

TELLURIDE, COLORADO STILL SERVING: YES

Way before it played host to the denizens of a frou-frou film festival, the New Sheridan Bar in Telluride was the location of a barroom brawl in George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* in 1969. Like so many wild-west boozers, the original site was destroyed by a fire in 1894 and rebuilt the following year. It has since been renovated, becoming the New Sheridan Hotel and Chop Restaurant, the newest-oldest venue in Telluride.

FORT SMITH SALOON

RIDGWAY, COLORADO STILL SERVING: YES... NEXT DOOR

The Fort Smith Saloon was featured in Henry Hathaway's True Grit in 1969 and exists now as the Unicas Southwest handicraft store. For those wanting to make a pilgrimage to the spot, you'll be pleased to hear that next door is the True Grit Café, built as a monument to the film and its star, John Wayne, offering a classic tex-mex menu with much movie memorabilia adorning its walls.

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YAKIMA CANUTT

A MOST
MAGNIFICENT
MOVIE
STUNTMAN.

f you were to talk to the rough and tumble pioneers of Hollywood's early westerns — Tom Mix, John Wayne and the like — they'd be sure to tell you that Yakima Canutt was one tough sonofabitch. Standing 6'3", with a hillbilly drawl and a past as a rodeo champion, Canutt was a maverick stuntman and choreographer. He drove wagons off cliffs, threw himself from running horses, took rolls in army tanks, and developed the onscreen barroom brawl to balletic perfection. Canutt had been breaking in broncos since his teens, and took his expertise to the burgeoning silent film industry in 1919. There, he doubled for macho icons like Clark Gable and Errol Flynn.

It's fair to say that the 1910s were not an era known for their stringent health and safety regulations. Silent audiences wanted new thrills thrills, and there was an imperative to top what had come before. Between 1925 and 1930, over fifty men perished while doing Hollywood stunt work. In slapstick comedy, Harold Lloyd lost three fingers while holding a live stick of dynamite. Westerns weren't much different. Canutt developed his signature death-defying stunt in the late 1920s, and repeated it over and over. It required him to jump from the saddle to a horse-drawn wagon, fall between the running horses and let the coach pass over him without being trampled. Sometimes Yakima would even come full-circle, hauling himself over the rear axle of the wagon and climbing back on it to defeat the villain once and for all. The move soon became a cliché of the entire oater genre.

Its most famous iteration came in John Ford's seminal Stagecoach from 1939, but there's an even more fascinating outcome in 1934's The Trail Beyond, where Yakima misses the jump and falls flat to the ground — only to haul himself back onto his horse and successfully execute the stunt the second time around. Some smart cameraman left the mistake in the film, upping the excitement factor ten fold.

By the early '30s, Yakima Canutt was the foremost stuntman in the movie business, with a lucrative sideline in playing gun-twirling villains. He was also well-known for co-ordinating his own stunts, sketching them on paper and inventing life-saving manoeuvres. He even patented his own equipment, including an L-shaped stirrup to make it safer to fall from a running horse.

Assigned to something like eight films per year, even someone as proud of his safety record as Yakima had his spills. Leapfrogging onto horses and toppling wagons, he broke his nose on set in 1924. It was the first of what would be a long list of injuries.

In 1936, on the set of San Francisco, Canutt doubled for Clark Gable as a wall fell over him. He sustained six broken ribs when, instead of ducking for cover, he pushed a young extra out of harm's way. Again doubling for Gable in 1940's Boom Town, Canutt was severely injured as a horse fell backwards onto him. The saddle horn punctured his intestines, forcing him into a long convalescence. Leaping from a horse again in 1943, he snapped both legs at the ankles. It was around this time he was forced behind the scenes, and he focused his attention on co-ordinating stunts in films like Ivanhoe, Ben-Hur and El Cid.

By 1966, after a half-century in the movie business, Yakima became the only stuntman in history to receive an Academy Award. Yet his greatest claim to fame comes from the lessons others gleaned from him. The Duke's laconic, grizzled persona was straight from the Yakima Canutt handbook. John Wayne imitated his walk, his talk, and the way he fell off his horse. He knew Yakima was the real deal – a genuine ranch hand and rodeo man. The star referred to him as, "the most magnificent man I ever met". CHRISTINA NEWLAND





DAMES

THREE WESTERNS
DIRECTED BY WOMEN

1. A MAN FROM THE BOULEVARD DES CAPUCINES

(1987) BY ALLA SURIKOVA

A gigantic hit when it was originally released in Russia, Alla Surikova's quaint 1987 western satire, A Man from the Boulevard des Capucines, is a film which says that celluloid is the best weapon to get those trigger-happy varmints to holster their pieces. It follows a man named Mr Johnny who drops in to a generic town with a cinematograph under his fur-coated arm and transfixes the locals with an array of one-reel silent comedies. Soon hard liquor is being replaced with glasses of milk. When it comes to westerns, women have more often directed one-hour TV serials – a feature-length run out is extremely rare. And so it seems rather fitting that, as the Cold War was puttering to a close, Russia would have a woman produce a local satire of the most quintessential of American artforms.

2. THE BALLAD OF LITTLE JO

(1993) BY MAGGIE GREENWALD

Aside from a number of remarkable anomalies such as Anthony Mann's *The Furies*, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* and Samuel Fuller's *Forty Guns*, the western rarely offered a valuable showcase for women who weren't romantic ciphers. Maggie Greenwald's forgotten 1993 gem, *The Ballad of Little Jo*, is a film which suggests that the only way a woman could



fight against the ingrained male oppression of the era was to become a man themselves, as abused Josephine (Suzy Amis) transforms herself into Little Jo with a quick hair crop and some bedraggled leather duds. Greenwald's film combines classic cross-dressing social infiltration with a harsh depiction of a time when being a woman was characterised by rape, abuse and social slavery. It's a beautifully put together film in the classical Eastwood-ian mould, and one well deserving of rediscovery. It's also a pre-emptive corrective to the horrors of the following year's soft feminist monstrosity, Bad Girls.

3. MEEK'S CUTOFF

(2010) BY KELLY REICHARDT

In the 21st century, there's usually two, maybe three westerns of any note that drop from that hallowed movie chute in the sky. In 2010 we were given one of the best movies of the new millennium in Kelly Reichardt's feminist, existentially-inclined range western, *Meek's Cutoff*. This tale of a lost wagon train on the Oregon plains mixes a paranoiac fantasy about the chronic fear of local invaders. It a melancholic, philosophical tale which poses questions about the futility of the life choices we make. Reichardt doesn't make the film about strong women per se, but cleverly critiques western conventions by filtering the story through the womens' ears – the men make the choices as the women cook, clean and overhear their fate being decided for them, often by hotheaded idiots. **DAVID JENKINS**





TEN NEO-WESTERN ABOMINATIONS.

WORDS BY ADAM LEE DAVIES

BLAZING STEWARDESSES

1975 USA

DIRECTED BY:
Al Adamson

STARRING:

Yvonne De Carlo, Don 'Red' Barry, The Ritz Brothers

When a sexy western's alternate titles range from Creamy Layover and Cathouse Cowgirls to The Great Truck Robbery, it's reasonable to wonder just how much dust you'll be getting with your lust. Indeed, very few oaters revolve so intimately around energetic membership to the Mile-High Club, or a fleet of stolen condom machines. To allay audience's fears that this jarring mix-up of softcore grot is simply unused footage from director Adamson's own 1974 polemic The Naughty Stewardesses, producer Sam Sherman (Lash of Lust, Brain of Blood. Wand of Flesh) breezily appropriated half of the title of Mel Brooks's smash-hit comedy Blazing Saddles. Ever wonder what a producer actually does? That. Set on a "dude ranch" and featuring a spatchcocked subplot about a saloon owner having his johnny shipments rustled by a gang of masked bastards, BS can perhaps point to a few slack sinews connecting it with western traditions, but such claims are heavily outweighed by scenes of giggly nymphets bouncing around airplane bathrooms with coked-up

Japanese businessmen.



1961 UK

DIRECTED BY: Roy Ward Baker

STARRING:

Dirk Bogarde, John Mills, Mylène Demongeot

Blighty wasted no time in jumping on the fetid spaghetti western bandwagon with a fruity take on the genre that smacks less of bloody, fly-specked bolognaise than cucumber sandwiches and milky tea. John Mills' vaguely Irish priest is sent by the Pope himself to a shitpot Mexican backwater that's buckling under the gun of leather-decked pistolero Dirk Bogarde. There he finds an odd enclave of the old west where cut-glass English accents and suspiciously modern automobiles abound. His vocation will be called into question by a three-ball love affair in which the girl is never more than the sexual kindling for the wildfire of passion sparked between himself and Bogarde. Camper than a row of tartan teepees, the whole thing explodes in a climax of gunplay that culminates with the dying Mills lying atop the equally dying Bogarde and tearfully begging him to "squeeze [his] hand" before they both cark it. Spent, the camera dreamily pans down to rest on Bogarde's still-tumescent leather crotch. Fin.

LEMONADE JOE

1964 CZECHOSLOVAKIA

DIRECTED BY: Oldrich Lipský

STARRING:

Karel Fiala, Rudolf Deyl Jr. and Kveta Fialová as 'Tornado Lou, the Arizona Warbler'

Like describing a rainbow to a blind man or explaining theory underlying Schrödinger's Cat to an actual cat, parodying western tropes for a Soviet audience that hasn't seen any westerns might seem like a tall order. Slathered with a sickly amber tint that makes it look like the film was developed in a solution distilled from offbrand urine cakes, this Czech comedy-musical-prohibitionwestern meets its audience half way by skewering cowpoke conventions with tonto bohemian surrealism to create an overcranked dream state that's half Buñuel and half Benny Hill. The titular Joe is a teetotal quick-draw spoilsport shilling 'Kokakola' to the drunken denizens of Stetson City. The black hat of the piece is a moustachetwirling Gene Wilder mangué known variously as Hogofogo, Horace Badman and Dr Quartz Edible violins blackface jazz funerals and the Sphinx all get a look in before our hero kills Hogofogo. With a corkscrew.

GREASER'S PALACE

1972 USA

DIRECTED BY:
Robert Downey Sr.

STARRING:

Allan Arbus, Toni Basil and Hervé Villechaize as Mr Spitunia

So this is what a Robert Downey Sr joint is like. A beatifically clueless hepcat with a fishtail zoot suit, a lemon kipper-tie and a ginormous Jewfro literally parachutes into the weird west and - without breaking stride - starts walking toward Jerusalem to fulfil his dream of becoming a song-anddance man. He is assisted by his theatrical agent William Morris, an expert Peter Lorre impersonator who is wandering about the desert caked in Alice Cooper makeup, wearing a homemade space-suit, and who may or may not be God. Standing in Jesse's way is a Scottish land baron named Seaweedhead Greaser, a local bigshot who spends much of the film attempting to resolve chronic constipation problems by forcing an imprisoned mariachi band to blast him with polka music while he squats on the dunny. Quite rightly ignored upon release, the film was later championed by Quentin Tarantino, who screened it nightly during the shooting of Diango Unchained.

JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER

1966 USA

DIRECTED BY:
William Beaudine

STARRING: John Lupton, Narda Onyx, Cal Boulder

It's hard to escape the long held B-movie logic that combining two genres into one film should result in twice as many bums on seats. And if you were to make two films alongside one another, wouldn't that cut down on overheads? And if you shot them both in a week...? Hmm. Filmed in eight days alongside the near-identical cowboy/creature feature Billy the Kid vs Dracula, veteran director William 'One-Shot' Beaudine's final brace of films are proof of the law of decreasing budgetary returns. Notable only for their koo-koo titles, they represent a tawdry end to a career that started as assistant director to DW Griffith on Birth of a Nation. Beaudine then went to England to pal around with George Formby before returning to Hollywood a forgotten man to pump out the remainder of his 372 lowbudget directorial efforts which included such seminal titles as Get Off My Foot, Trick Golf, Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla and Love Me, Love My Biscuits.

ZACHARIAH

1971 USA

DIRECTED BY:George Englund

STARRING:

Don Johnson, John Rubinstein, Patricia Quinn

Conceived by LA's satirical comedy/stage/recording troupe The Firesign Theatre (key album: 'Don't Crush That Dwarf Mama, Hand Me Them Pliers'), the 'first electric western' is a latenite hippie brainwave that's woken up - hazy, cottonmouthed and wearing tovshop cowbov duds - in the middle of the desert with the cameras rolling. Based as was the style of the time - on a 1922 Hermann Hesse novel of self discovery in ancient India. Zachariah is a blow-dried westworld of electric guitars, perfect teeth, catwalk kibbutzing and flat TV lighting. It's a place where the suspicion lingers that the entire enterprise is based on the questionable USP of having Joe Walsh's funk rock also-rans The James Gang portraying the actual James Gang. Its toothy, curly-blonde hero, way-out poster ads and structureless scenes of a holy fool lost to rock debauchery are also a clear inspiration for the 1975 film version of The Who's rock opera Tommy. So now you know who to thank for that crap.

BLUEBERRY

1999 FRANCE/MEXICO/UK

DIRECTED BY:
Jan Kounen

STARRING:

Vincent Cassel, Juliette Lewis, Eddie Izzard

With a cast that couldn't be more 1999 if they were listening to Bran Van 3000 while fiddling with their Gameboys, it's fair to say that Blueberry (aka Renegade), like many films of that magical era, has dated rather badly. Adapted from a longrunning French comic strip, the film is a choppy mess of western clichés and PC revisionism that might just have gotten by if it had seen the story's routine revenge plot through to a predictable two-gun showdown. doesn't. It goes totally insane. Wounded in battle, our hero is administered a psychotropic brew that sends him - and the last 17 minutes of the film - on a visual trip that couldn't be stranger or more intense if Jim Morrison had crawled out of his grave, got a job in a Soho effects house and spent 72 hours locked away with nothing but Orbital CDs, satanic lithography and a Magic Eye poster soaked in LSD.

BIG MONEY

2010 USA

DIRECTED BY:
Paul Andresen

STARRING:

Violent J, Shaggy 2 Dope, Nihilist Gelo

We're entirely certain that all the killers and hundred dollar-billers that make up the LWLies readership roll pretty deep with the Insane Clown Posse, but one or two of you might need a very quick refresher. A pair of GWARlite horrorcore rap bozos out of Detroit, Michigan, the ICP dress up as clowns, produce weirdo carnival hip-hop and get into minor verbal dustups with the likes of Eminem. They've also made a pair of robustly awful but rather jolly films. This prequel to 2001's gangland aria Big Money Hustlas, BMR is in essence a freaky-deaky, misogynist, X-rated Muppet complete with interspecies sex, anachronistic musical numbers, puerile sight gags and random celebrity cameos - in this case a lengthy and increasingly perturbing appearance by Tom 'Rack 'em Up' Sizemore as himself.

FACES OF DR LAO

1964 USA/CANADA

DIRECTED BY: George Pal

STARRING:

Tony Randall, Barbara Eden and Royal Dano as 'Casey, the Brutal Henchman'

What exactly is a western? are modern-day westerns. space westerns and curry westerns, so it can't be down to the historical period, the setting or the clothes. And is every film set in the old west a western? Back to the Future III? Cruise and Kidman's Oirish landgrab romancer Far and Away? And should a film about a peaceable old Chinese magician (played by the hip, urbane and very, very white Tony Randall) that develops into a camp and catty assault on smalltown values before spiralling off into a loopy finale that features a seven-headed Loch Ness monster stomping around desert accompanied by the deafening skirl of a thousand massed bagpipes be considered an oater just because it takes place west of the Pecos?

10

LOS LOCOS

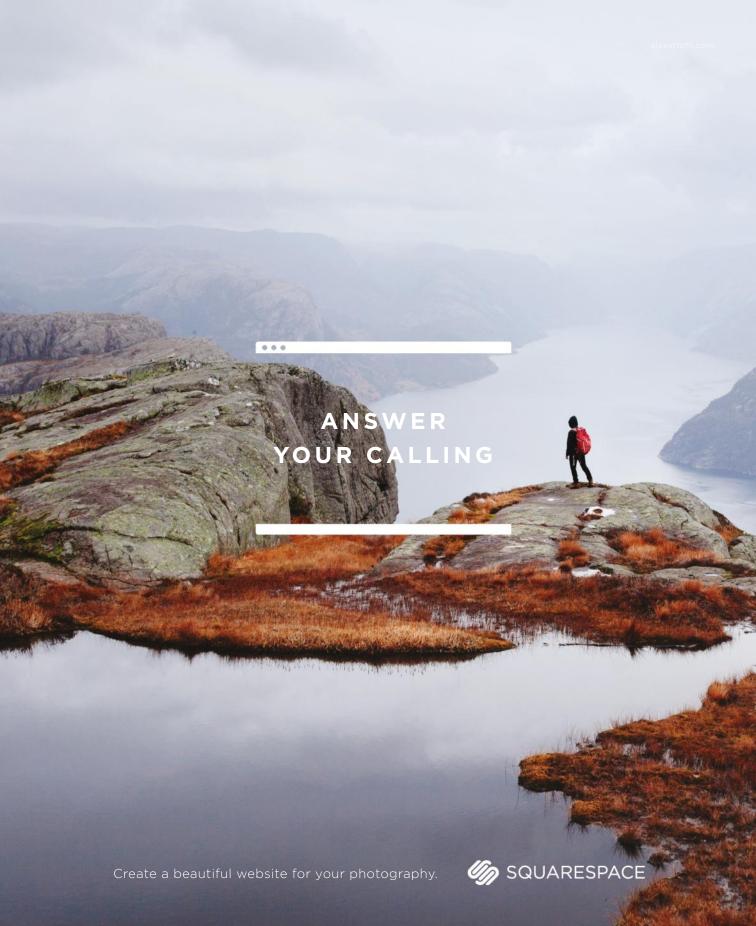
1997 CANADA

DIRECTED BY: Jean-Marc Vallée

STARRING:

Mario van Peebles, Minora Walters, René Auberjonois

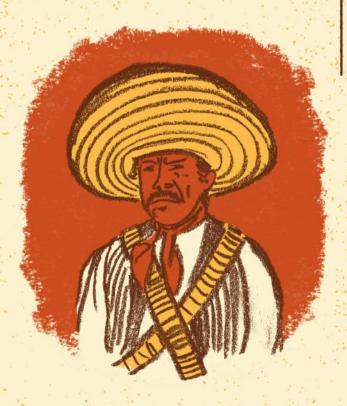
The Name of the Rose II: Road Trip! The simply gorgeous premise behind *Los Locos* has the capacity to deliver one of the all time cinematic car crashes. Escaped Civil War prisoner Mario van Peebles - yeah, good already isn't it?! - is offered a chance at freedom if he helps a killer nun transport a tattered wagonload of mentally disturbed, physically disabled and just plain mad hospital inmates across the desert to a new asylum. The OCD guy, the guy who's in stocks because he eats anything and everything, the guy who freaks out at loud noises, the religious nut who's obsessed with fat women - the gang's all here and waiting for the 18-wheeler of unintentional hilarity to collide with the packed schoolbus of indignant outrage. But the accident never happens. Sadly, the film develops into a charming little knock-off of The Outlaw Josey Wales in which van Peebles displays magnetic leading man qualities that were never hinted at before and haven't been seen since. What a swizz!





EMILIO FERNÁNDEZ

"HEMINGWAY, HUSTON AND PECKINPAH WRAPPED INTO ONE"



f you've seen Sam Peckinpah's blood-spurting masterpiece *The Wild Bunch*, you'll have no trouble recalling drunken-eyed, droop-'tached Mexican warlord General Mapache. Dispensing cruelty as casually as he puffs on his log-sized cigars, he's one of the great western movie villains.

You could argue, though, that the man playing him, Emilio Fernández, was the even greater villain. A revolutionary, drinker, brawler, womaniser, and occasional cold-blooded killer, Fernández was a bona fide western badass. He led the kind of action-packed life that – even if you only believe half of it – is enough to send your jaw tumbling to the floor. And that's even before you consider that he was also one of Mexico's greatest filmmakers.

Born in 1904, el "Indio," as he was nicknamed because of his mixed-race parentage, started out fighting the Mexican government as a young revolutionary, landing in prison in 1923 before escaping to the US – by dynamiting his cell wall, he claimed. There he wormed his way into the movies as an extra and bit player in B westerns and other productions, returning to Mexico in 1934 following an amnesty.

Moving behind the camera, he struck up a partnership with cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa that lasted 22 films and put Mexican cinema on the map long before Alejandro González Iñárritu and lenser Emmanuel Lubezki arrived on the scene. Socially conscious and visually striking, their patriotic movies often featured tough female leads, reaching their peak with the likes of *Portrait of Maria*, which won the 1946 Palme d'Or, and the John Steinbeck-penned *The Pearl* from 1947.

But the darkness was never far away. No doubt many filmmakers have at one time dreamed of exacting bloody revenge on a critic, but he was perhaps the only one who ever did. When a tequila-soaked meeting with four journalists at his home descended into a quarrel, he fetched his gun and started taking potshots at them, seriously maining one.

As Fernández' films went out of fashion and he was reduced to uncredited second unit work (*The Magnificent Seven*) and acting jobs (he also features in pal Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo García*, *Magnificent* sequel *Return of the Seven*, and numerous 'mexi-westerns'), his Wild West-style antics only increased. This culminated in 1976 when he was jailed for killing a 26-year-old man in a gunfight over a young Gypsy woman in a small Mexican town. Alleging self-defence, he served six months of a four-and-a-half-year sentence.

Reporters at the time accused Fernández of living his life like a movie. And there's no doubt he had a flexible relationship with fact and fiction: at various times he claimed to have murdered his mother's lover at the age of nine, dated Greta Garbo, hung out with Al Capone and served as the nude model for the Oscar statuette. There's also the story about him saving Robert Mitchum and Jack Palance during a gun battle in a Mexico City nightclub.

You wouldn't bet against any of it being true. But like many of his Hollywood counterparts, there's also no denying Fernández, who died in 1986, embellished events to forge his personal legend. The difference in his case was that he turned it up to 11.

"Emilio was a poet, a writer, a director, a womaniser, drinker and a murderer," Peckinpah's assistant Katherine Haber summed him up. "He was Hemingway, Huston and Peckinpah wrapped into one and turned into a Mexican." NICK FUNNELL

MAKE YOUR MARK

000



GUNSPINNING

A FIVE-STEP GUIDE TO
PERFECTING THIS ARCANE
ART - A COSMETIC FLOURISH
TO THE GUNPLAY OF MANY
A MOVIE WESTERN.

WORDS BY SOPHIE YAPP

— STEP 1 —

Firstly, take your toy – toy! – gun and pretend to make sure the chambers are empty to enhance the illusion of reality. Or, if you're really gnarly and cack-handed, make sure the vicinity is cleared. Ensure there are no vases or delicate artefacts in your immediate environment.

— STEP 2 —

Keep your hands and fingers well lubricated to avoid any friction from the metal. Putting talcum powder in a sock works well for this. Avoid using any wet or oily substances otherwise the gun will slip out of your hand.

- STEP 3 -

Keeping your index finger crooked and your other fingers straight and out of reach of the gun, slowly make a circle movement clock-wise by moving downwards and then back up again.

- STEP 4 -

Keep repeating this motion, making sure that you're spinning with your hand and not your arm. It's important to keep it contained with all the power and control in your hand,but keep your hand loose. As you spin, you'll gradually gain more momentum.

- STEP 5 -

Finally, on your last spin, gently throw the gun upwards while spinning and catch it, with the barrel facing away from you. Remember that after the last spin, you want to end in a position where you're able to shoot, so try to avoid going too crazy and launching it at a great force.







IS FOR

HORSES

FIVE WESTERN STARS AND THEIR HORSES.

WORDS BY DAVID JENKINS

BUCK JONES AND SILVER

From beginning his career as a \$5-a-day stuntman, Buck Jones quickly clambered up the ranks to become a regular rotation screen cowboy for Fox Film Corporation. He went on to star in over 200 western pictures. 50 of those were with his trusty steed Silver (himself with 73 movie credits). There's a rumour that, when Jones died in 1942 (rescuing people from fire at Boston's Cocoanut Grove club, no less), Silver was so upset by the loss of his master that he stopped eating and duly kicked the lunch pail in 1943.

GENE AUTRY AND CHAMPION

Buck Jones' career tailed off when America gained a taste for singing cowboys, and this happened as Gene Autry's career swooped into the ascent. Part of his appeal was down to his partner, Champion the Wonder Horse, a sorrel-coloured mare with a stripe on his nose and white stockings on all his legs (except the right front). The original Champion died in 1943, yet he had already forged his own brand, reincarnated through other horses, in comic books, radio plays and even live appearances. His champion status was down to him being able to untie knots, roll over, play dead and even shake his head to answer or no.

JOHN WAYNE AND DUKE

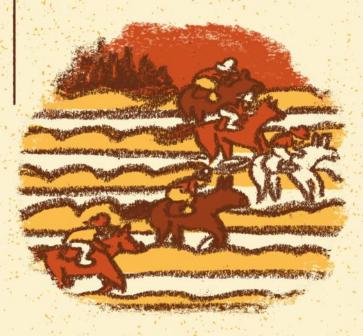
John Wayne was given the nickname Duke as a young boy and it stayed with him into adulthood and subsequent stardom. He also had a horse named Duke which he used in six western features made between 1932 and 1933, and for which the horse received equal billing to the star. It seems to be a point of some contention as to whether Wayne "liked" horses or not – some believing he only rode them for the camera, others that he was quite the horseman and took pleasure in distributing riding tips to newbies.

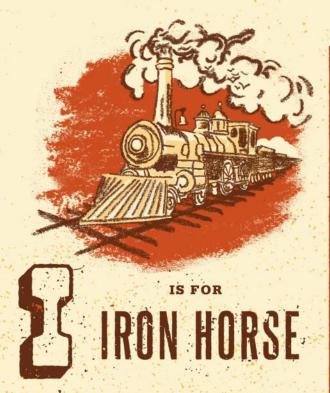
LEE MARVIN AND SMOKEY

Smokey took the role of Lee Marvin's horse in 1965's Cat Ballou, the film for which the gruff icon won an Oscar for his good/evil duel role. Yet he wasn't the only one picking up silverware for his work, as Smokey himself picked up a Craven Award in 1966 for his excellent animal "acting".

CLINT EASTWOOD AND MIDNIGHT

Midnight was the horse ridden by Clint Eastwood during his time spent in TV land, earning his spurs playing impetuous cattle hand, Rowdy Yates. He was a black horse with a tiny white star pattern, and a long screen career was capped off by an appearance in the lusty comedy western (and Gene Kelly's directorial swansong), The Cheyenne Social Club from 1970. In her memoir, 'Fall Girl: My Life as a Western Stunt Double', Martha Crawford Cantarini said of Midnight: "[he] had a way of making those who worked with him look better than they were."





he expansion of the railroad is often framed as a steam-driven death knell for the traditional cowpoke. At the same time, it represented the opening up of American society, connecting places and people and relegating western movie mainstays like the cattle drive to oblivion. It's seen as a mighty innovation in John Ford's silent adventure film, The Iron Horse, as engineers put themselves in mortal danger to lay track through disputed lands. In Delmer Daves' 3:10 To Yuma, the eponymous locomotive is a symbol of justice served, as it becomes the responsibility of a nervy rancher to post a murderer off to his destiny. Perhaps the most symbolic incarnation of the train in westerns comes in Sergio Leone's Once Upon a Time in the West, in which the expansion of the railroad brings with it the bloody baggage of corruption and violence. DJ



is JESUS

RELIGIOUS PARABLES AND EGO TRIPS.

erhaps the blood-splashed lore of living/working as a cowboy would leave a cool distance between the benign redemptive power of Our Lord Jesus Christ. A film like George Stevens' Shane offers one of the western genre's most blunt Jesus allegories, as Alan Ladd's gentleman avenger moseys into town to take on the Devil and sacrifices his life in order to save humanity. Perhaps the most bizarre 'Christ western', however, is Peter Fonda's 1971 chimera, The Hired Hand, in which the actor-director films himself, usually in a state of semi undress and with an unkempt proto-hipster beard, chopping up wood and then cooling himself off in the river and allowing the water droplets to sparkle in the midday sun. Though the film might not be directly inspired by the Bible, despite its fable-like simplicity, there's certainly a messiahcomplex element to the manner in which Fonda places himself in front of his own camera. DJ

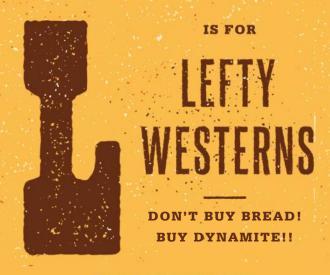






or AKIRA KUROSAW

A side from his formidable film back catalogue, Japanese director Akira Kurosawa is the director who opened a gateway to the west for Asian cinema when his 1950 film Rashomon won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Alongside the ability for audiences to finally lavish in eastern screen culture, filmmakers were able to use these films as templates for their own adventures in cinema. John Sturges' The Magnificent Seven is a direct remake of Kurosawa's own classic Seven Samurai, replacing a rag-tag band of ill-matched swordsmen with a gun-toting wreckin' crew led by man in black Yul Brynner. His Yojimbo, from 1961, in which a Man With No Name(!) saunters into a corrupt town and plays warring factions against one another was to become the template for Sergio Leone's Clint Eastwood vehicle, A Fistful of Dollars. DJ



A CELEBRATION OF 'ZAPATA WESTERNS' WHOSE IDEOLOGY SWINGS A LITTLE MORE TO THE LEFT THAN NORMAL.

merican cinema doesn't like to make too much of the fact that the country's neighbour to the south experienced a successful revolution. Over a decade starting in 1910, a series of popular uprisings against landowners and the political establishment grew into a civil war which eventually ended autocratic rule and established land reform. Unsurprisingly, Hollywood generally preferred to present prerevolutionary Mexico as a lawless hellhole, where Yankees who did stray south could prove their mettle, as in the original Magnificent Seven. Even the most famous Hollywood account of the revolution, Elia Kazan's 1952 Viva Zapata!. used its saga of the famed rebel leader to mount an anti-communist hatchet-job, assuring US audiences that such liberation movements

always end in corruption.

A bit like the evil Soviet
Union, no?

In the Italian film industry, the mindset was rather different. As the Spaghetti Western cycle flourished in the wake of Sergio Leone's box-office breakout Dollars trilogy, filmmakers fed their own political predilections into various films tackling the era of the Mexican revolution. Not every Italo-western could involve Clint Eastwood dispatching half the cast in cool and inventive ways, some aspired to be more complex and ideologically relevant. And thus was born the so-called Zapata Western. Unusually, the key figure here was a writer rather than a director, Franco Solinas, a determined leftist old enough to have lived through the Mussolini era, who is elsewhere lauded for such bracing arthouse classics as Gillo Pontecorvo's

The Battle of Algiers and Costa-Gavras's State of Siege.

His westerns are definitely more in the entertainment mould, often shaped around the fractious relationship between a Mexican peasant firebrand and a gringo interloper. The best place to start is probably 1966's A Bullet for the General where gun-runner Gian Maria Volonte eventually realises he's been played by Lou Castel's undercover American assassin, and hence comes to invest in the revolutionary cause — with a rallying call 'Don't buy bread! Buy Dynamite!!'. In the same year's The Big Gundown, passing gunslinger Lee Van Cleef reaches a new ideological understanding, realising that he and the peasant rabble-rouser (Tomás Milian) he's been hired to apprehend have a common enemy in a corrupt landowner — a scenario more or less replayed in A Professional Gun via lusty frenemies Tony Musante (Paco, the clueless revolutionary) and Franco Nero (Kowalski, the amoral Polish mercenary).

On the face of it, there's a certain binary simplicity about these stories, pitching a grass-roots liberation movement against vile self-serving capitalists, but their sincere antigringo rhetoric is certainly a refreshing blast against the familiar Hollywood models. The overall intent is obviously to boost the morale of contemporary leftist movements back in Europe. That said, these films in no way underplay the sheer level of carnage involved in armed struggle, while 1969's Tepepa sees a more nuanced assessment of Tomás Milian's protagonist, weighing his inspirational Che-like revolutionary leadership against his machismo attitude to women as sexual chattel.

By the early '70s however, Italian westerns in general were starting to lose steam, and in the post-'68 comedown, the political climate had also cooled for the European left. Enter Sergio Leone, big daddy of the Spaghetti Western, to deliver a final word on the whole Zapata sub-genre, with the epic A Fistful of Dynamite. Here the odd-couple narrative dynamic is familiar, with larger-than-life peasant Rod Steiger and embittered IRA man James Coburn getting caught up in the escalating revolution. Referencing the political carnage then beginning to taint Italian society, the point of the film is to show that armed liberation merely inflicts more brutality on the unfortunates its supposed to be serving. Is this the only western ever to begin with a Mao Tse-Tung quote? "The revolution is not a dinner party...the revolution is an act of violence". But not in a good way... TREVOR JOHNSTON







IS FOR

MEDIC

A LOOK AT HOW TO REMOVE
A BULLET USING THE
TRINITY OF C'S.

bundant gun and crossbow injuries in western movies are essentially a given, but what can we learn about how to survive such injuries? Behold the trinity of C's: cauterisation, compression and consumption (of whiskey).

Cauterising the wound alleviates bleeding and infection, as we learn in Delmer Daves' *Broken Arrow*, where Tom (James Stewart) creates a fire to cauterise the apache's eight gunshot wounds. Henry Hathaway's *True Grit* (and the Coen Brothers' 2010 remake) addresses the importance of blood compression by immediately bandaging gunshot wounds after the bullet removal procedure, as does Howard Hawks' *El Dorado*, through the handy use of a bandana.

David Von Ancken's Seraphim Falls shows whiskey acting as both a method of bracing oneself and an excruciatingly painful form of disinfectant, as a wounded Pierce Brosnan digs a bullet out of his arm using his knife. He cauterises the wound by scalding it with a knife heated on the fire and then compresses the bleeding further with a bandage.

Gunslinger Hogan (Clint Eastwood) in Don Siegel's *Two Mules for Sister Sara* drinks copious amounts of whiskey to numb the pain of removing a lodged arrow. Using gunpowder as his only source of cauterisation, his companion Sara (Shirley MacLaine) pushes the arrow straight through him when he lights the gunpowder. She then uses moss to compress and putrefy the wound.

Please do not try this at home. SOPHIE YAPP



NATIVE AMERICANS

IS FOR

he western is often criticised for co-opting Native Americans as feather-plumed ghouls who exist as an exotic hinderance to the work of the honest cowboy. There are three key films which sought to overturn that belief. One was Delmer Daves' Broken Arrow from 1950, in which James Stewart happens across a wounded Apache brave in the desert and, instead of finishing him off, nurses him to health and is eventually accepted by chief Cochise. The film is often considered one of the first to view Native American characters as rounded and empathetic - they have customs and rituals that, beyond the surface, aren't so different from those of the pilgrim fathers but Stewart's character discovers that the desire to perpetuate a land-war for reasons no-one can truly remember remains overwhelming in the hearts and minds of both parties. Samuel Fuller's Run of the Arrow from 1957 is a more brutal and fever-pitched take on Kevin Costner's Academy Award magnet, Dances With Wolves, as a southern army defector (Rod Steiger) joins a Sioux tribe, takes a wife and then suffers from a violent identity crisis when war breaks out. Perhaps the most soulful and introspective film about Native American cultural identity is John Ford's epic Chevenne Autumn, chronicling the near-Biblical exodus of desolate Chevenne from Oklahoma to Wyoming. Though never explicitly intended as such, the film comes across as Ford's attempt at a corrective to his earlier classics in which Native American characters were little more than targets on the landscape, the representation of a vague, aggressive other out to kill the white man for reasons that were seldom explored with any depth. DAVID JENKINS



ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR
COMPUTER GAMES OF ALL TIME
TAKES ITS INSPIRATION FROM
WESTERN LORE.

f you want to know how the work of the time-honoured cowboy exists in the modern era, look no further than your dusty home computer monitor and the wildly popular early role-playing phenomenon of 'The Oregon Trail'. 21-year-old student, Don Rawitsch, developed the game along with his college room mates with the help of a giant map of the American frontier circa 1800 and a pack of cards with various mishaps - snake bites, broken wagon wheels, etc... Gawp at the 8-bit wonderment of single-tone, Lincoln green prairies as this choose-you-own-adventure yarn takes you along the famous northern byway and throws up countless logistical conundrums to solve en route. The game was initially developed as a private teaching aid, but soon become all the rage among the big wheels in the Minnesota public school system. When it first appeared on the Apple II system in 1979, the game swiftly garnered widespread acclaim and hit status - kids and adults alike wanted nothing more than to digitally emulate that travails of their itinerant forefathers and experience the bittersweet pangs of rural community building. Iterations of the game live on today despite a bungled corporate take-over and changing tastes in public consumption. Perhaps this is a singularly American cult, but Rawitsch remains a celebrity in gaming circles. In a February 2016 Reddit AMA, he admitted that even though his life's work was dedicated to the trail, he'd never actually walked it himself. When he was asked what he would like written on his tombstone, he responded: "He helped kids learn". **DJ**







t's the source of incredible sadness in cinema when we're shown the dying remnants of American frontier life. Filmmakers from the classic era used the death of the cowboy as grist for the mill, often coming up with some of the richest, most reflective and philosophical oaters ever made. "Bloody" Sam Peckinpah is perhaps the post-western godhead, his onetwo punch of 1969's The Wild Bunch and 1970's The Ballad of Cable Hogue standing as two of the finest depictions of old men losing the race against modernity. By the time of 1972's Junior Bonner, the cowboy was nothing more than a clown, as Steve McQueen's Ace Bonner parlays his experience as a rugged outdoorsman into a tidy career as a rodeo rider. This set-up was taken to the levels of operatic tragedy 20 years earlier in Nicholas Ray's The Lusty Men, in which the prospect of life as a daredevil bull rider is the morbid endgame of carefree machismo. Horses, too, have become a burdensome blight on the landscape, good for little more than being captured and turned into pet feed in John Huston's 1961 film, The Misfits. Classic westerns are often about the preservation of unwritten laws and rituals, men resorting to violence to maintain a status quo. The post-western sees these same men fighting for survival, looking for ways to adapt their particular skill-set to a society that's changing around them. The high seriousness of frontier life was gone - Frank Perry's Rancho Deluxe from 1975 even pokes fun at the bad guys, as a pair of fun-time cattle rustlers played by Jeff Bridges and Sam Waterston must alter their schemes to chime with changing times. In movies, when the cowboy died, he was reincarnated as a clown. DJ



IS FOR

QUEER

ng Lee's Brokeback Mountain from 2005 was arguably the moment when the western finally moseyed out of the closet for all to see. Prior to that, man's-man ruggedness and the mythic conception of cowboys as American world-builders suppressed anything that might be directly read as 'fruity'. The recent sub-genre of the 'bromance' could be ascribed to the intense relationship between Jesse James and his eventual assassin. Robert Ford, especially as it has been depicted on film. A famous scene in Samuel Fuller's ace 1949 feature debut, I Shot Jesse James, played on the near-erotic obsession John Ireland's Ford had for his laconic mentor. An iconic scene sees Reed Hadlev's James naked in a bathtub, with Ford also in the room. "Well, go ahead, Bob," he

says. "What are you waiting for? There's my back - scrub it!" Delmer Daves' comedy western (a strange sub-genre of its own), Cowboy, from 1958 toyed with the idea of men alone out on the range with Jack Lemmon's effete hotel clerk joining the crew of Glenn Ford's hyper-masculine Texan cattleman. The pair meet with the latter taking a bath, tumbler of whiskey in hand, cigar in mouth and hat on head. Acceptance is confirmed when, at the end of the film, the two are able to bathe together in the same room. It wasn't until the '70s that LGBT characters were identified as such on the screen, with the most notable featured in Arthur Penn's Little Big Man, in which Dustin Hoffman recounts his life having been inducted during his youth into a Cheyenne tribe. The film not only features openly gay character, but one who is revered by friends and family. It was only when the traditional cowboy was displaced from the prairie and dropped into the big city was he able to truly explore any latent sexual proclivities. Jon Voight's Joe Buck, as seen in John Schlesinger's Midnight Cowboy, is the type of buff cowboy archetype later appropriated by bands like the Village People. The film is frank about Joe's fluid sexuality, or perhaps his reluctance to remove the romantic stigma from casual trysts. **DJ**







IS FOR

RANOWN

"SOME THINGS
A MAN CAN'T RIDE
AROUND"

IN PRAISE OF WESTERN MAESTRO
BUDD BOETTICHER AND HIS FILMS
COMANCHE STATION, THE TALL T
AND RIDE LONESOME.

WORDS BY GLENN HEATH JR

idway through Budd Boetticher's 1960 film Comanche Station, a remarkable exchange unfolds between two young bounty hunters. Lying awake under the stars, Dobie (Richard Rust) wakes up his sleeping compatriot Frank (Skip Homeier) for a chat. Their sobering moonlit conversation about the nature of self-worth becomes like a two-way confession, with each man attempting to reconcile past failures and justify those still on the horizon. "I sure hope I amount to something," the ill-fated Dobie concludes. He never will, and it stings.

This quiet and beautiful scene would usually be reserved for A-list talent. That it involves uneducated supporting characters exemplifies just how thoroughly Boetticher and screenwriter Burt Kennedy obsess over the essence of masculine pride. Both outlaws and heroes grapple with questions of honour, greed and sacrifice. This effectively blurs the lines between classic western archetypes, forcing a reconsideration of good and evil.

Comanche Station along with The Tall T and Ride Lonesome (three of seven films that form the director's now seminal "Ranown cycle", named after their producers Randolph Scott and Harry Joe Brown) form a trilogy of sorts, entirely dedicated to these themes. Overt similarities are immediately apparent, with exact lines of dialogue even popping up multiple times ("Some things a man can't ride around"). Jaded moral dilemmas seemingly spring from the cavernous rock formations that play over each opening credit sequence. And of course, Randolph Scott stands at the centre of all three, playing different variations on the quiet, tormented searcher restlessly looking for redemption.

Modest carbon copies at first glance, these films brilliantly consolidate those prickly Western stand-offs that question a man's purpose in life. Fate often plays a role as well. In *The Tall T*, a rancher named Brennan (Scott) loses his horse while gambling only to get picked up by a stagecoach that ends up getting robbed. *Ride Lonesome* and *Comanche Station* both feature the actor playing a bounty hunter who falls in with deadly competitors in order to survive attacks.

Here, the dance between pragmatism and survival never ends. How a man carries himself during especially tough situations means everything. Scott's characters are heroic because he remains consistent to his word. On the flipside, Boetticher and Kennedy see cowardice and psychopathy as the ultimate villainy. Take for instance the slimy gold digging bookkeeper in *The Tall T*, who is viciously murdered during a final act of betrayal by a shark-eyed assassin.

Interestingly, there's a desire to settle down by many a Boetticher/Kennedy cowboy, either by owning property, marriage, or both. As a result, women are often treated as objects, either sexual or emotional, and given very little depth. This is most egregious in *Ride Lonesome*, a strikingly lean masterpiece that ends with the image of a hanging tree on fire. While Scott's hero confronts the ripples of past trauma and is given closure to boot, Karen Steele's buxom blonde exists simply to be ogled and pushed to the fringes. Yet, while you would never call Boetticher and Kennedy feminists, theirs was a man's world that questioned why being good was so damn hard.





IS FOR

SNOW

WESTERNS ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR
DEPICTIONS OF RUGGED WANDERS
IN THE DESERT SUNLIGHT. BUT
WHAT ABOUT THOSE WITH STORIES
SET IN THE DEEP COLD OF ALASKA?

WORDS BY PETER LABUZA

THE SPOILERS

(1914) SELIG POLYSCOPE CO.

Two years before the birth of the cinema, historian Frederick Jackson Turner claimed in an 1893 lecture that westward expansion of the frontier had ended. Movies, however, reincarnated the myth through one of its most iconic genres: the western. But the tundra of Alaska remained uncharted territory. Gold fever hit the territory in 1896, and the US only adopted it as a state in 1958. Hollywood films about Alaska often transported the western myth on to stories of the snowy expanse. One of the earliest surviving works of this time was The Spoilers, based on a Rex Beach novel about the Klondike Rush of 1914. This nine-reel epic follows a romance between William Farnum and Kathryn Williams alongside various political intrigues. There's no snow (Producer William Selig had established the first permanent LA studio), though there's plenty of mud alongside a dynamite climax and a stunningly realistic fight sequence. The popular novel was continually remade, including with Gary Cooper in 1930 and John Wayne in 1942.

THE CHEECHAKOS

(1922) ALASKAN FILM PRODUCTIONS

Alaskan-set westerns became a dime a dozen in the 1920s, but they were seldom shot on location. In response, Alaskan prospector and oil man Austin Lathrop independently financed the first Alaskan-shot adventure tale, *The Cheechakos* (pronounced 'chee-kaw-koze'). The film opens with a breathtaking shot of a ship catching fire along the Chilkoot Pass which leaves a young girl in the hands of two prospectors who raise her. From there, it becomes a rip-roaring melodrama of love, murder and reunification – complete with dog sledding, white water rapids and collapsing glaciers. The amazing footage, however, felt old hat to audiences who had seen the territory in documentary travelogues, preferring stories to at least feature their favourite stars: Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* became the "Alaskan" hit of the decade.

ESKIMO

(1932) METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

After Universal Pictures had a small success with their semi-documentary Igloo in 1932, Louis B Mayer sent an extravagant crew (including Beverly Hills' most famous chef) to Alaska to make an epic about the Native American tribes. Directed WS Van Dyke (who had already made "exotic" films in Kenya and Tahiti, and later the Thin Man films), Eskimo recruited Igloo performer Ray Mala, a part-Jew/part-Eskimo cameraman, to star in front of the camera as a skilled "noble savage" hunter who fights white American traders. Signs outside the Broadway theatre promoted, "Eskimo Wife Traders! Weird Tales of the Arctic!" highlighting the film's taboo sexual relations (Mala's wives are played by Asian American actresses). On a more progressive note, however, Eskimo does feature most of its dialogue in the original Inuit with English subtitles. The film launched Mala's career, though he sadly spent his time in Hollywood playing similarly stereotypical roles. His screenplay about the contemporary trials and tribulations of his culture remained unmade through to his death in 1952.

SPAWN OF THE NORTH

(1938) PARAMOUNT PICTURES

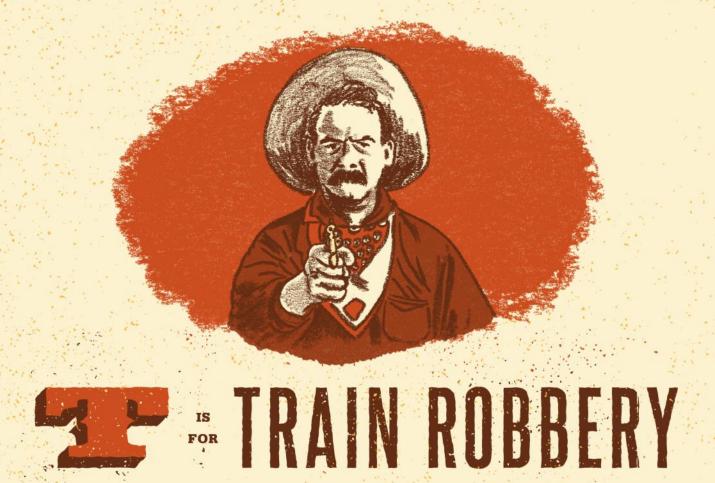
Alaskan landscapes eventually got their proper dues in Hollywood, peaking with Henry Hathaway's poetic tale Spawn of the North from 1938. While Cary Grant and Carole Lombard were originally set to star, shooting schedule conflicts led to the casting of Henry Fonda, George Raft and Dorothy Lamour. The film follows the story of the feuding owners of two salmon fisheries, though Hathaway often uses his camera to collect lyrical footage of the wildlife and landscape. Hathaway and composer Dimitri Tomkin collaborated with Los Angelesbased Native Americans to create rhythms and sounds for the score, notable for a scene in which Fonda and Raft respectfully observe an Inuit ritual from afar. Second unit footage of Alaska - including the exciting glacier-collapsing finale - was scrupulously integrated into the California-shot action from cinematographer Charles Lang; the Oscars gave a special distinction to visual effects advisor Gordon Jennings and created the special effects category the following year.



THE FAR COUNTRY

(1954) UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL

Studios never found a cost efficient reason to shoot films in Alaska. Even Anthony Mann, whose cycle of Westerns with James Stewart featured numerous signature landscapes across the US, only used Alaska as a generic backdrop in *The Far Country*. Written by Borden Chase (the scribe of Howard Hawks' classic *Red River*), the film sees Stewart star as a loner type who joins up with Walter Brennan to help on a cattle migration from Alaska through the Yukon Territory, while also fighting off a cheating judge John McIntire. The snow-covered backdrops rarely match up with the seemingly temperate foregrounds (despite location work in Alberta, Canada). For Hollywood, setting films along the cold tundra of what became the 49th State simply meant an excuse to break up the monotony of the desert landscapes of its most popular genre. But the specificity of what has made the space unique is rarely factored into the Westerns. Alaska has rarely played itself.



n his (still) fantastic overview of American cinema from 1995, A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies, the hallowed auteur talks about how the best directors of genre films were a lot like jazz musicians. A basic template is formed, and it's the job of the filmmaker to find new ways to express the same idea or motif. That being the case, Edwin S Porter's seminal 1903 film, The Great Train Robbery can be see as the original twelve-bar riff on which all subsequent western movies have been based. Scorsese even emulated the film's most iconic image, a haunting post script in which one of the outlaw robbers silently unloads his six-shooter directly into the lens. It can be seen during a montage in Goodfellas, where Joe Pesci fires his gun into the camera and, by extension, into the faces of the audience.

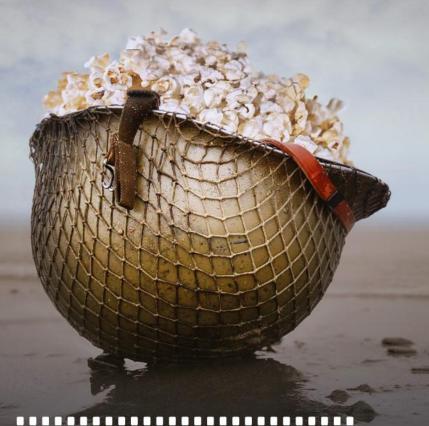
Porter's film remains a masterpiece of economy and innovation. A gang of armed robbers break into a switchman's office and tie him up before sneaking on to a commuter train with the loot from a safe. Porter films the action methodically, flatly and unemotionally. There's a strange objective remove, almost embellishing the film with a sheen of documentary. When the film starts, the tone is never settled upon. Is this a screwball comedy? Will

these bumbling crims soon be carrying out insane stunts on a steam train? Once the hostile takeover occurs, the stoker is dragged up to the coal waggon, has his head staved in with a rock (very subtly masked so you can't see the impact), then has his corpse thrown from the moving train. It's a genuinely horrifying moment.

The plot charges forth, the evildoers are eventually foiled by an industrious child (who else?!) who unties the switchman. The simple morality of good triumphing over evil is muddied by nuance. The vigilante band who take to the hills have been too busy dancing and drinking to realise that anything was amiss. When they eventually locate the robbers, burying their money in a woodland glade, they're massacred without trial. While the content of this 12 minute film lives on as more of a fragment in future movies - not just westerns, but heist and gangster pictures also - it's the look and feel of the film that's most important. The way the action is choreographed and the characters built are integral foundation stones to this uniquely American form. You can see The Great Train Robbery in films as diverse as John Ford's The Iron Horse, Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch and even Andrew Dominik's The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. DAVID JENKINS



LONDON

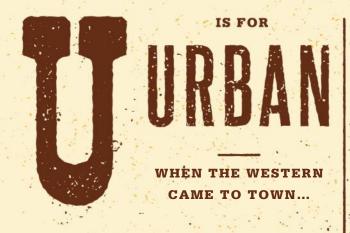


REAL TO REEL

A CENTURY OF WAR MOVIES

1 July 2016 – 8 January 2017

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ny movie looks like a western if you squint like Clint Eastwood staring into an off-screen lighting rig blazing like the desert sun. It's a great pub game: you name a movie, I say how it's a western. Start out observing that in George Romero's zombie classic Dawn of the Dead a group of battle-hardened survivalists clear the nihilistic marauders from a potential space of commerce. A couple of pints later you'll discover Douglas Sirk's melodrama Imitation of Life is all about divided racial loyalties and the possibility of reinvention in a big country. So as the classic Hollywood western was overtaken by revisionist takes on its myths and politics, its themes, particularly relating to masculinity, law and order, found a new home, far off the range. It's called the urban western.

By the 1960s and '70s, decades of racist planning policies had locked American cities into a self-perpetuating cycle of urban decay and white flight. The most flavoursome New York films of the period, like 1967's subway-hijacking thrillers *The Incident* and *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* from 1974, reflect the common perception of an urban environment as lawless and foreign as the Wild West. "We defended the city as best we could," begins Donald Barthelme's short story 'The Indian Uprising', published in 1965. "The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds." Though Barthelme's humour is cheeky and his politics liberal, the story reads as a premonition to the race riots of Detroit and Newark two summers later.

Into this maelstrom strode Clint Eastwood. In the 1968 film Coogan's Bluff, his first starring vehicle set in the present, he's an Arizona deputy trying to keep his Stetson on straight around the Big Apple's punks and hopheads. (The film's antithesis is the following year's Midnight Cowboy, in which Jon Voight's Joe Buck has his identity subsumed by hippies and homosexuals). Eastwood's subsequent big-city lone-gunslinging, in Dirty Harry, proved so popular a fantasy of modern frontier justice that John Wayne himself took on the heroin trade, in 1974's McO. Charles Bronson's role as a civilian avenger in the Death Wish movies pushed the goodguy-with-a-gun narrative to its extreme. Around the same time, Bernard Goetz opened fire on four black would-be muggers on the New York subway.

The ultimate New York vigilante, the urban cowboy to end all urban cowboys, is Travis Bickle of Taxi Driver.

Among the scuzz and racial animus of NYC circa 1976, Jodie Foster's tween streetwalker is the Natalie Wood to Robert De Niro's John Wayne. *Taxi Driver* is famously inspired by Wayne and John Ford's 1956 film *The Searchers*, about a man driven by a deranged obsession with racial purity to rescue his niece from her Native American abductors, itself inspired by pioneer-era 'captivity narratives'. The scholar Richard Slotkin's study of in that field and other formative frontierland myths is titled 'Regeneration Through Violence', an ethos to which Travis Bickle very much subscribes. ("Someday a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets.")

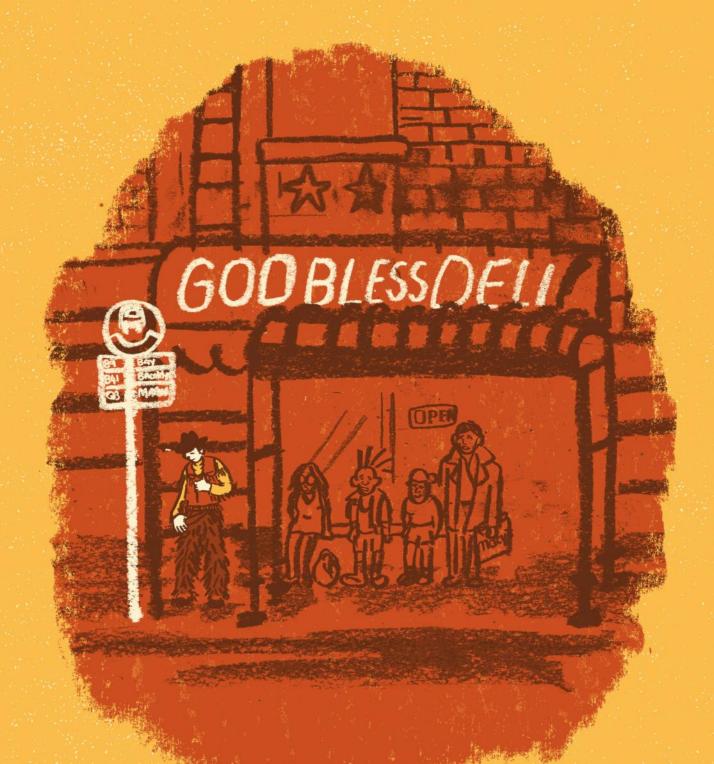
In 1959's Rio Bravo, Howard Hawks makes the West's wide open spaces a blank canvas for Wayne's honour and capability as the sheriff of an isolated town standing up to the marauders massing at the other end of its main street. John Carpenter's loose Rio Bravo remake, Assault on Precinct 13 from 1976, also concerns an outgunned lawman holding down the fort. His screenplay was originally named The Anderson Alamo, Anderson being the "bad neighbourhood" where a valiant cop makes his last stand against a war party of gang members massing outside a police station. The film's widescreen cinematography emphasises Anderson's vacant lots, filled only by random violence until the cavalry finally arrives.

The outpost in a violent wilderness is also a theme of Ford's 1948 film Fort Apache, where home furnishings from back east project a civilising influence even as the Apache take down the telegraph lines stretching back across the rocky expanses. During the 1970s, more than one NYPD station house was nicknamed 'Fort Apache' by the officers serving there. Fort Apache, the Bronx from 1981, set in the 41st Precinct, begins with a showdown on a dusty main street – dusty from all the abandoned buildings which burned, collapsed or were being demolished around that time in the South Bronx. You practically expect a wad of tumbleweed to roll by.

"ANY MOVIE LOOKS LIKE A WESTERN, IF YOU SQUINT LIKE CLINT EASTWOOD STARING INTO AN OFF-SCREEN LIGHTING RIG BLAZING LIKE THE DESERT SUN."

"What is this, the gunfight at the OK Corral?" is the first thing we hear Paul Newman say in the film. His self-contained cop, Murph, contends with drug-related violence and the random psychosis of urban poverty within the neighbourhood's Puerto Rican community, while his fellow-officers, almost all men, banter like Hawks characters. But he ultimately believes more in his own code than in a system that turns a blind eye to corruption. When he finally tosses down his badge, he's like a cross between Frank Serpico and Gary Cooper at the end of High Noon.

"We are no longer under siege," the captain of the 41st Precinct told the New York Times in 1993, and it's true that the urban western's social and cinematic moments have more or less rode off into the sunset. But the next time you're squinting at some Marvel superhero, listen closely, as behind the swish of a cape you'll hear the words: "Shane! Come back!" MARK ASCH



IS FOR

VITTLES

WESTERN MENU

TUCKOUT FOOD MENU

Breakfast, 2 / 6 Luncheon, 2 / 6 Dinner = 3 / 6

STARTERS

- CHOOSE FROM -

Sowbelly Wasp Nest with Brown Gargle. Sourdough bread and fat salt bacon sowbelly drizzled in honey, served with coffee in a tin cup. (Key: Wasp nest = Bread, Brown gargle = coffee)

Hard Cheese Hot Rock. Hard cheese dipped and melted in paraffin wax, served with sourdough biscuits and pickles. (Hot rock = biscuits)

Rocky Mountain Oysters with Cackleberries. Sliced and fried calf testicles shirred in the pan with spinach and hard-boiled eggs. (Rocky mountain oysters = sliced and fried calf testicles, Cackleberries = eggs)

DISCLAIMER

During the course of your meal should any gang of outlaws or gunslinger seeking vengeance come by and interupt a patrons meal by way of a shootout or bar-room brawl, we, the proprietors take no responsibility or offer any refund or voucher. RESEARCH BY,
SOPHIE YAPP

MAINS

— CHOOSE FROM —

Love Apple and Whistle Berry Chilli with Swamp Seed. Chilli made of canned beans and tomatoes with sage and buckwheat-seasoned beef, served with rice. (Whistle Berries = beans, Love Apples = tomatoes, Swamp Seed = rice)

Meat and Bean Hole Beans in Texas Butter. A choice of either skillet, roasted or griddle-cooked beef (fresh or dried) or pork (cured with salt, brine or pickle) with bean hole beans, buttered peas and corn and served with bread and gravy. Bean hole beans = beans cooked in a hole dug into the ground lined with stone and cooked in a fire, Texas butter = gravy)

Son-of-a-Gun Stew. Boiled calf made into a broth and griddle-cooked into a stew with wild onions, beans, peas, carrots and boiled potatoes. (Son-of-a-Gun stew = made from whatever is available and the organs of a recently slaughtered calf)

DESSERTS

— CHOOSE FROM —

Apple Boggytop. Baked apple pie with an open top, made from apples, beaten eggs, sugar and butter, served with cream or custard. (Boggytop = Open top pie)

Crushed Hot Rock Plum Crumble. Steamed plums in a crumble made from crushed sourdough biscuits, served with cream or custard. Steamed Spotted Pup and Huckdummy. Dried apples, raisins and apricots reconstituted in water and made into a steamed sponge pudding, served with cream and sourdough biscuits with raisins. (Huckdummy = Biscuits with Raisins, Spotted Pup = Steamed pudding with raisins)

DRINKS

— CHOOSE FROM —

Drinks served in any of the following, depending on size:

Tot (Small glass)
Seidel (Beer glass)
Pistol (Whiskey bottle)
Noggin (Small drinking mug)
Lone Sleever (Large drinking glass)
Joram (Large drinking bowl)

ON THE WATER WAGON

(NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES)

Adam's Ale (Water)
Brown Gargle
Black Water (Weak Coffee)
Blue John (Skimmed Milk)
Canned Cow (Canned Milk)
Vinegar Lemonade

DUST CUTTERS

(ALCOHOLIC DRINKS)

House Rotgut. 100 proof rye or bourbon liquor, cut with turpentine **Tanglefoot.** Whiskey made with raw alcohol, burnt sugar and chewing tobacco

Barbwire. Strong whiskey Red-Eye. Strong, poorer quality whiskey A Boilermaker and his Helper. Beer chases with a cheet of whickey

chaser with a shot of whiskey **Cactus Wine.** Tequila and peyote tea **John Barleycorn.** Beer – served at

room temperature

Valley Tan. Whiskey derived from wheat and potatoes





WOODY STRODE

lance through any list G collecting icons of the western genre, and you'll notice two things: lots of men, all with white faces. Following a career in football and professional wrestling, American actor Woody Strode gained notoriety as one of few black actors to be cast in screen westerns. Though his most high profile role is as a noble fighting slave in Stanley Kubrick's Spartacus, he'll likely be remembered for his prolonged creative relationship with director John Ford. The first collaboration their remains most important: the 1960 cavalry western Sergeant Rutledge. in which Strode plays a soldier wrongly accused of raping and murdering the daughter of his superior. Its undertow of civil rights abuses and racial profiling remain raw to this day, and Strode's turn as the sternly indefatigable Rutledge stands as one of greatest in the Ford canon. He was a mainstay in westerns all through his career - his final performance was in Sam Raimi's frisky shoot-out western from 1995, The Quick and the Dead. DAVID JENKINS



IS FOR

ike any genre worth its salt, the western received its own erotic spinoffs and parodies, oftentimes titles the merely from placing the word "porno" or "sexcapade" at an opportune spot and running from there. 1971's The Female Bunch sees a suicidal Las Vegas cocktail waitress fall in with an allfemale band of outlaws based on a Mexican dude ranch (with no dudes allowed). 1968's Nude Django... well, it's fairly self explanatory how that one plays out. One of the earliest examples of the erotic western was by a director named Peter Perry, aka AJ Gaylord, aka Arthur P Stootsberry, aka Seymour Tuchus. 1959's Revenge of the Virgins was Perry's debut. It sits at an awkward but historically intriguing crossroads between the Z-grade quickie and a sincere stab at a genuinely transgressive oater. It looks a mid-tier western teleplay has been randomly intercut with booby footage of buxom native american tribeswomen. On closer inspection, it is just that. DAVID JENKINS







IS FOR

YOSEMITE

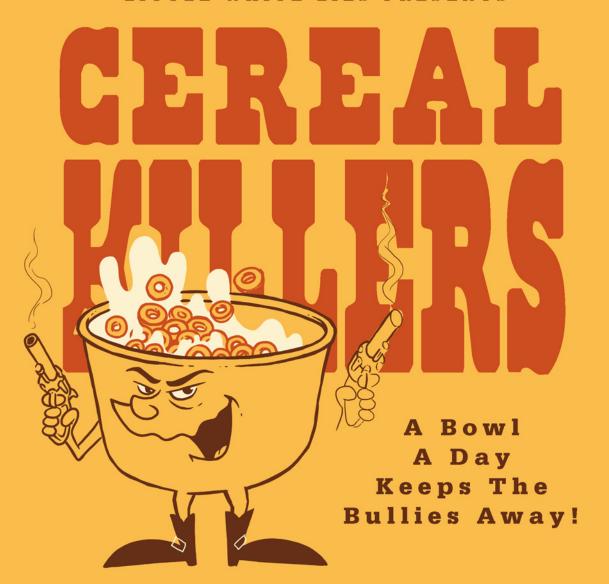
he brainchild of Looney Tunes pioneer Friz Freleng, Yosemite Sam (real name: Samuel Michelangelo Rosenbaum) was created as an alternate foil for Bugs Bunny - a more aggressive, cannier foe than the comparatively benign Elmer Fudd. The character made his screen debut in the 1945 Merrie Melodies short, Hare Trigger, where audiences were quickly introduced to his famous short-fuse as well a number of recurring visual gags about his diminutive stature (in the first scene, a train he intends to rob passes right over his head). Upon first meeting Bugs, Sam refers to himself as "the meanest, toughest, riproarin'-est, Edward Everett Horton-est hombre what ever packed a six-shooter." a nod to the American character actor known at the time for his cartoon voice work. ADAM WOODWARD



ZANE GREY

hough the author Zane Grey was, upon his death, touted as being a producer of books as popular as 'The Bible' and 'The Cub Scout Handbook', it's his 1912 novel 'Riders of the Purple Sage' for which he's most likely to be remembered. Largely because it's often said to be one of the main influences on what we now consider to be the modern movie western. It's the story of religious persecution and misogyny in Utah - a female ranch owner is shunned for following the pangs of her heart rather than the call of her God. The story was adapted for the screen on five separate occasions, the earliest in 1918 and the most recent in 1996. Yet, this seminal text is more famous as a key evolution point in the western genre rather than the specific films it went on to spawn. DAVID JENKINS

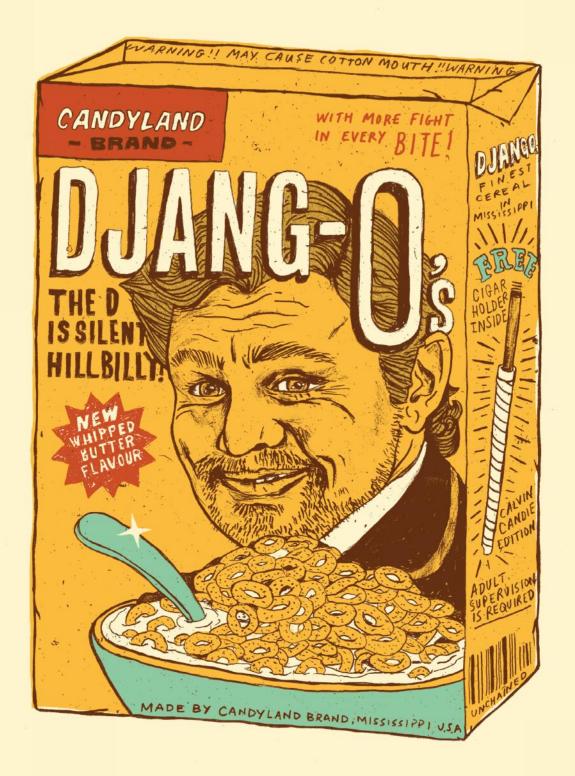




//LWLIES// HAS SCOURED THE WESTERN GENRE TO LOCATE A BAND OF WILLIAMS SCOURED THE WESTERN STEWRET THE DOCATE AS BANDROFF, WIS SCOURED THE WESTERN STEWRET THE DOCATE AS BANDROFF WIRE WHAT IF THEY HAD THEIR OWN CEREAL BRAND?

WE APPROACHED SEVEN MAGNIFICENT DESIGNERS TO OFFER UP WITH APPROACHED SEVEN MAGNIFICENT DESIGNERS TO OFFER UP THE PROPERTY OF THE PROPERTY OF THE DAY AS REPRESENTED BY A VILE, NO-GOOD VARMINT.

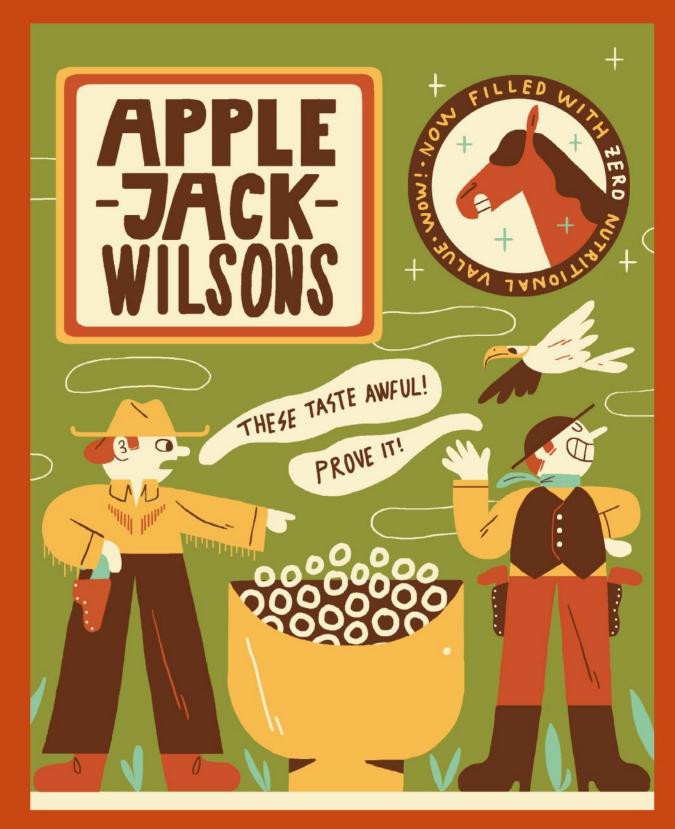
CURATED BY TIMBA SMITS.



CALVIN CANDIE IN DJANGO UNCHAINED - PLAYED BY LEONARDO DICAPRIO



BILLY THE KID IN YOUNG GUNS - PLAYED BY EMILIO ESTEVEZ

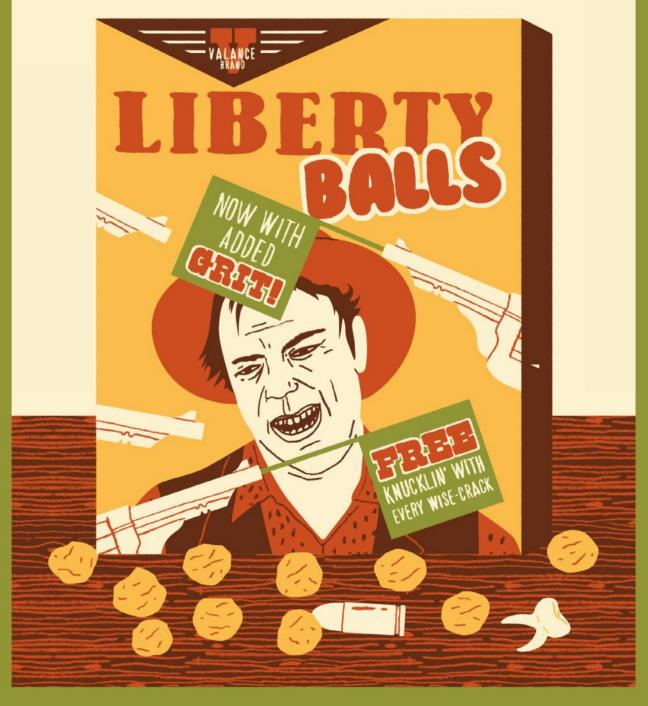


JACK WILSON IN SHANE - PLAYED BY JACK PALANCE

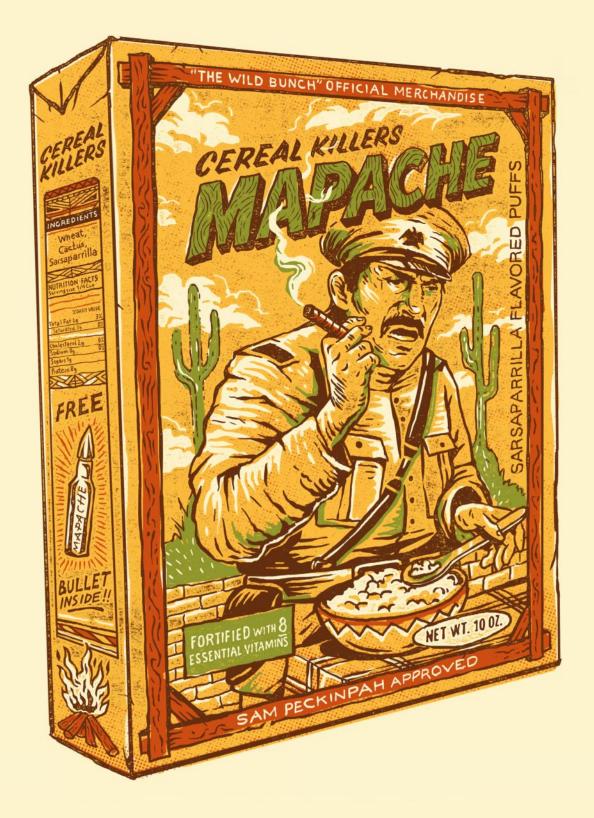




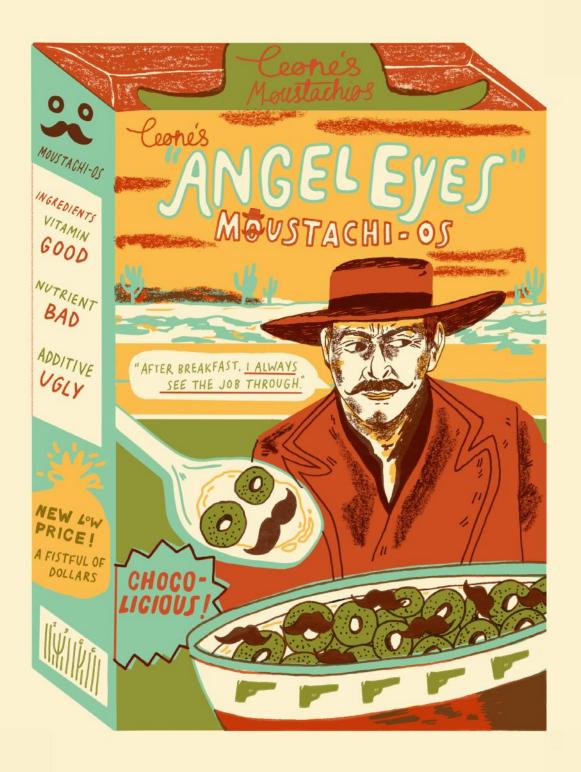
IF YOU'VE GOT 'EM, HE'LL KICK 'EM



LIBERTY VALANCE IN THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE - PLAYED BY LEE MARVIN



MAPACHE IN THE WILD BUNCH - PLAYED BY EMILIO FERNÁNDEZ



ANGEL EYES IN THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY - PLAYED BY LEE VAN CLEEF



LITTLE BILL DAGGETT IN UNFORGIVEN - PLAYED BY GENE HACKMAN



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Things To Come

Directed by
MIA HANSEN-LØVE
Starring
ISABELLE HUPPERT
ANDRÉ MARCON
ROMAN KOLINKA
Released
2 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

As a writer and director, MH-L is the best of the best. No question.



ENJOYMENT.

Another stunner, though not quite up there with all her other stunners.



IN RETROSPECT.

If you like Isabelle Huppert, you might want to block out a week in the diary for this one.

onfirmation, were it needed, that Mia Hansen-Løve is one of the greatest filmmakers currently plying her trade on this green Earth. *Things To Come* is her exquisite follow-up to her 2015 masterpiece, *Eden*. It suggests that making movies comes as easy to her as speaking or breathing or reciting a line of verse. It's a reflex action. Her latest wayward opus is, somewhat surprisingly, a film about cats. Maybe not directly or even intentionally, but its story involves an overweight black cat named Pandora who is the philosophical nucleus of this rustic rumination on what it means to truly experience freedom in our everyday lives.

Isabelle Huppert is at her most Isabelle Hupperty (in a good way!) as Nathalie Chazeaux, a doting mother, a successful and well-liked philosophy prof, wife to an intellectual equal and daughter to an ex-model who cherishes her company. She has money, a holiday home and there are always fresh-cut flowers on the table. As with Hansen-Løve's earlier works, *Father of My Children* and *Goodbye, First Love*, this one takes a dramatic u-turn at the mid-point and all these social givens are quickly removed from the equation.

A lesser director may have used this as an opportunity to turn the screws and ride the teary waves of a prolonged meltdown. But not this one. Nathalie remains calm and accepting of life's unavoidable road bumps. She chooses not to draw on her vast repository of philosophical wisdom in an attempt to rationalise these natural disasters. And it's not that she couldn't, it's that she knows it would offer her no real consolation. Suddenly she has gone from having everything and being tightly locked into a system, to having nothing and being entirely free.

Pandora the cat represents her life after the fall. She can now live by her own timetable. She can wander in the wilds and take in the elements. When Nathalie heads on a trip to visit one of her prize students, Fabien (Roman Kolinka), in a dilapidated farmhouse down Grenoble way, she's more concerned with the wellbeing of her furry travel companion than she is about the sweetly juvenile musings of her protégé. When she accepts that this newfound freedom has its downsides, particularly during late middleage, the cat becomes a physical symbol of her quandary and the source of much upset.

The magic of Hansen-Løve's cinema is that she doesn't so much tell stories as she carefully collates details and understands how they are able to enhance one another when placed together. A scene in which Nathalie's husband admits to his extra-marital hanky panky is entirely stripped of melodrama. Savage blows are dealt with a featherlight sense of diplomacy. It would almost be funny if it weren't so sad. Yet

a few scenes later, when Nathalie comes home to find a conciliatory bouquet on the coffee table – a weak attempt at an unspoken apology, or an affirmation that this spilt is believed to be no biggie – she explodes in a rage. Suddenly, the showdown receives its belated aftermath.

Nothing here is forced, and the title offers a no-nonsense reminder that everything Nathalie experiences, we will likely look forward to ourselves. The sadness at the core of the film is her realisation that she has no answers, and that perhaps there are no answers. The film's relationship to philosophy, the belief that we can ascribe meaning to action or that we can ever hope to understand the inner workings of another person, is suspect, bordering on the critical. Hansen-Løve never feels the need to state this - she allows the images do all the talking. A recitation from Blaise Pascal's 'Pensées' at a funeral highlights Nathalie's discernment and intellect more than it is able to define the tragedy of death. Perhaps the writerdirector isn't against philosophy as a purely poetic or academic form, but she seems warv of its value in the the modern world.

At times the film is so cautious, so defiantly delicate, that the meandering loses a sense purpose. There's a sense that too much effort is being expended on making sure that anything even bordering on the overlysuggestive or symbolic doesn't make it to the screen. Hansen-Løve takes the material to the very edge, but chooses not to push it over. Filmmakers set their own standards, and astonishing though this is, it doesn't quite reach the heights of her formative works. It ends up offering the cute suggestion that the cycle of parenthood is what saves us from the tedium of liberty. The film opens on a visitation to a hilltop graveyard and ends on the birth of a baby, suggesting that while some may see life as merely the drawn-out process of dying, others might choose to view it as a chance to keep being reborn. Chaos is cute on the page and around the dinner table, but best leave that to the cats. DAVID JENKINS







Hell or High Water

Directed by
DAVID MACKENZIE
Starring
CHRIS PINE
BEN FOSTER
JEFF BRIDGES
Released
9 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

A great cast and the writer of Sicario working on a smaller production.



ENJOYMENT.

Unexpected directions, sharp humour and powerful performances.



IN RETROSPECT.

A timely addition to the antiwestern genre and a perfect summer movie. slot in the experimentally inclined Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival seemed like a strange fit for this new film by David Mackenzie (*Starred Up*), with its starry cast and seemingly commercial intentions. It's a story that simultaneously revels in crowd-pleasing gestures, but also subverts generic rules and absolutely requires strong leads to carry out the deed.

Chris Pine and Ben Foster are up to the challenge, playing brothers Toby and Tanner who set out to rob a string of small banks in their native West Texas. Although Toby is the brains of the operation and Tanner the muscle, Mackenzie by and large rejects heist movie conventions, specifically the notion of the heroic and witty anti-hero who controls and terrifies his hapless victims. He instead presents a modern, realistic Texas in which poverty permeates every corner and touches all of its inhabitants. Rather than fear and awe, the brothers' victims have only contempt and pity for these desperate men hoping for more. The brothers cannot be authentic cowboys precisely because there is no money to steal. The modest wooden town houses seen in classic westerns, and the optimism they implied, have here been replaced by the precariousness of rundown lower-class homes, decaying and neglected.

Mackenzie relieves this demoralising message with a sarcastic sense of humour from both the civilians dealing with the robbers and the laconic authorities on their trail. Jeff Bridges as Ranger Hamilton comments with typical wit on the bleak economic situation and the obsolescence of every tradition that has given Texas its identity, including

himself. His favourite jokes are those aimed at his mixed race partner Alberto, who is half Native American, half Mexican, and a ranger on top of that. Alberto is a constant reminder of the harm done by old convictions.

Not stopping there, Mackenzie relies on a multitude of side characters, often members of the older generation, but also struggling young people trying to make ends meet. He evokes a pervading sense of nostalgia laced with resignation. Capitalism and its vices make the old fights between cowboy and outlaw seem like a walk in the park. The film is at its most gracious and touching when Hamilton is pensive, sitting alone, silently contemplating his approaching retirement and flooding the screen with memories of a time that was no fairer, but that he understood better.

While Tanner provides the action with his brutal enjoyment of violent crime for the sake of it, Toby's motives are more obscure and his plan more intricate. The progressive revelation of this fundamentally good man's intentions makes for slow-burn, gripping suspense, and a twist as subtle as it is maddening. In his selflessness and his love for his family, Toby remains a real cowboy, yet one fighting against new demons and doing so by playing their game. Hamilton and Toby - indeed all the characters - are united against the common enemy of capitalism, but their own former identities have faded away in the face of new dividing lines. The bank has power over everyone, but the richest citizens are the ones with freedom. The cowboy must hide behind money rather than out on the dusty plains.

MANUELA LAZIC



For its 30th birthday, the director of 1986's *Sid and Nancy* reflects on the mistakes he made.

he Sex Pistols' bassist, Sid Vicious, died of a heroin overdose in February 1979, 4 months after stabbing his girlfriend Nancy Spungen to death. By 1986, Alex Cox had made a dramatised biopic, starring Gary Oldman in his first leading role. Sid's bandmate and friend, John Lydon/Johnny Rotten, panned Sid and Nancy in his 1994 autobiography, calling it "fucking fantasy" and saying that Cox "was quite lucky I didn't shoot him." Alex Cox tells LWLies that before production began, he sent Lydon the script. The response was suggested changes, including Sandra Bernhard in the role of Sid, and the Johnny Rotten character as a Scouser. "It would have been impressionistic, and a slightly more revolutionary drama, but we didn't go that way." This is something that Cox regrets: "Looking back on it now I'm more in sympathy with Lydon's point of view than ever."

LWLies: Why is that? Cox: His take on it was a better one. Our attempt to emulate the scene was inevitably doomed to fail because you could never replicate something like that.

And why do it? Film is a work of art. It should have freedom and liberty. I like the film when it deviates from the true story, for example: the depiction of the concerts. The concerts were never like that. When punks were playing in London the gigs were sparsely attended. There would be some skinny guys doing the punk pogo, but we recreated it like the mosh pits of Southern California: massive crowds of people in there, wading about, because that was what I was used to.

What else would you would do differently if you remade Sid and Nancy today? I'd do just what Lydon told me to. I'd have Drew Schofield play Johnny as a Scouser. I'd have Sandra Bernhard play Sid. I wouldn't have the happy ending, you know, the taxi to heaven stuff, because I think that's very compromised. It's sentimental and dishonest, because we were trying to make a film that condemned Sid and Nancy for their decadence. The punk movement was essentially a positive movement that was supposed to be forwardlooking. You can't do that if you're a junkie rock star in a hotel room. The scene in the film that was the important one for my co-writer, Abbe Wool, and I was the scene where they go to the methadone clinic, and the character played by Sy Richardson gives them a lecture. He won't give them the methadone until he tells them that they've completely betrayed the movement and they've betrayed themselves. That was the point of the film, but I think that gets forgotten, and gets undercut by the quasihappy ending. If I was to remake it, I would end it with Sid dying in a pool of his own vomit.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER GARY OLDMAN? We had a fantastic casting director called Lucy Boulting who was based in London. She said to me, 'There's this boy who's acting in a play at the Barbican right now, The War Plays [by Edward Bond], you might want to go and see him.' So, I went to see the play and even though Gary only had a small part I was very impressed. I met him and talked about the character. Then I was in a real quandary because Lucy had introduced me to two young actors, just starting out, neither of whom had yet made a feature film. One was Gary Oldman and one was Daniel Day-Lewis. How to choose between two good actors? They would have brought different things to it. Daniel would have brought more of a romantic aspect to the character and made more of the love affair. Gary came from Bermondsey where Sid was from and was genuinely from a working class family, whereas Dan was from an aristocratic family and the son of a poet laureate.

Has there ever been an equivalent to the punk movement in cinema? In the late '70s, early '80s, there was a black film movement in Los Angeles involving people like Charles Burnett, Billy Woodberry and Julie Dash. It was called the LA Rebellion. They made very low-budget films, but they weren't like gangster, hip-hop, shootem-ups or blaxploitation movies. They were about the experiences of real black people. They were made without any funding from studios. They were extraordinary films by very talented filmmakers, especially Burnett, who is one of the best filmmakers ever

Sid and nancy is re-released in UK cinemas on 5 August





Cosmos

Directed by ANDRZEJ ZULAWSKI
Starring SABINE AZÉMA, JEAN-FRANÇOIS BALMER,
JONATHAN GENET
Released 19 AUGUST

omeone has gone to the trouble of creating a little noose out of string and hanging a sparrow from a branch by its neck. Happening across this macabre sculpture, jittery lothario Witold (Jonathan Genet) and his fashion designer pal Fuchs (Johan Libéreau) decide to dedicate some of their spare time to cultivating an investigation. They take a room in a family-run guest house, entering into a lop-sided bubble of surreal squabbles, experimental seafood suppers and erotically ingested cigarettes. Polish director Andrzej Zulawski died shortly after the premiere of *Cosmos* at the 2015 Locarno Film Festival, but he has left us with a giddy masterwork whose every frame positively heaves with stimulating ideas and incident. Adapted from the absurdist 1965 novel by fellow Pole Witold Gombrowicz, it's a story propelled less by logic than by its willingness to connect together symbols and clues in a rabid search for its own meaning.

Once the tone settles after the first few minutes, each scene is charged with hair-trigger suspense, as Zulawski promises us that nothing and no-one will head in the direction we expect. What's being said eventually seems less important than how it's being said, at what volume, to whom (if anyone), and who is speaking (often everyone). It's a cinematic symphony which jackknifes on a dime from the insane to the introspective. Witold clamours to understand what's happening, but his questions just lead to more questions. He realises that he must focus on what's important, and chalk up the torrent of enigmas as eccentric background noise. Not by any means for the faint of heart, *Cosmos* is nonetheless a juddering cloudburst of pure visual and aural energy, a rare instance of deep intellectual enquiry buoyed by unexpected jolts of pulsing emotion. Everyone involved understands that they don't need to understand – it makes Zulawski's precise orchestration of the cracked action appear all the more remarkable. A swansong of scary, screwball eminence. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Zulawski seems to have only recently received the critical dues he deserves.

4

ENJOYMENT.

What the hell just happened?!



IN RETROSPECT. Re-watching this one over and over will be a pleasure, not a chore.



The Man Who Fell To Earth (1976)

Directed by NICOLAS ROEG
Starring DAVID BOWIE, CANDY CLARK, RIP TORN
Released 9 SEPTEMBER

A time of writing, the world appears to be edging into a pretty volatile space. Capitalism is wavering. There's violence in the streets. Rifts are expanding between the classes. The haves care little for the wellbeing of the have nots. It seems timely, then, that Nicolas Roeg's 1976 masterpiece, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, should return to our cinema screens on a new 4K restoration, as it offers a melancholy vision of a planet that has likely seen better days. David Bowie is beyond-perfect as Thomas Jerome Newton, an alien visitor on a secret mission to save his home planet. The story, adapted from Walter Tevis' 1963 novel of the same name, sees Newton exploiting his access to futuristic technology and fast-tracking his way to dominating the global tech market.

His intricate plan then involves transferring his vast wealth into a space programme. Yet the film is about all the factors he didn't manage to account for - the boredom, the loneliness, the rivals, the alcohol and the lovers. Newton prizes his privacy, but discovers that even giving a small amount of it away, to ditzy hotel clerk Mary-Lou (Candy Clark) and womaniser turned engineer, Bryce (Rip Torn), is enough to light the touch-paper of disaster. Though Roeg is primarily known for films such as Don't Look Now, Walkabaout and Performance, it's this one which perhaps stands as his most unique, operatic and complex achievement. The use of elliptical editing helps it to stride across the years. Time is lost between every edit, giving a real sense of how long this endeavour takes to execute. Bowie's relative inexperience as a screen actor becomes one of the film's key assets, emphasising the idea of an outsider entering into a strange land. The film is extremely pessimistic, yet the fact that Roeg himself would be able to go to America and make a giant, plotless experimental sci-fi movie is testament to its theme of retaining hope even in the darkest of days. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. How has Nicolas Roeg's bizarre space opera held up 40 years down the line?



ENJOYMENT. This is looking better than it ever has. Bowie astonishes in the lead.



IN RETROSPECT. Deserves to be talked about as one of the director's greatest works.







Tickled

Directed by DAVID FARRIER, DYLAN REEVE Released 9 SEPTEMBER

o best experience the pleasures of David Farrier and Dylan Reeve's disquieting documentary, Tickled, you'd probably do best to read as little about it as possible. From the outset it appears to be a colourful, silly-season investigation into the fringe "sport" of competitive tickling. Discovered by Farrier during one of his regular click voyages in search of new material, an apparently innocent web video depicts young, ripped, enthusiastic men (always men) in branded sporting duds, manacled to a padded mat and then, for around an hour, tickling one another.

The footage is never explicit, and the competition element is left worryingly vague. The catch is, the company pumping out these videos offers first class flights to LA, plush accommodation upon arrival and a fat per diem for potential contestants. Farrier pokes his head down the rabbit hole thinking he'll find nothing more than a Friday funny for his local Auckland infotainment TV gig, but the foul and threatening response he receives from a publicist at Jane O'Brien Media (producers of the videos) leads him to suspect that there's more to this story than meets the eye.

At one point near the closing chapter of the film, Farrier says in his voiceover narration, "...and then things got really weird". He could've quite easily done with dropping this phrase four or five time during the film, as he and partner Reeve's dogged tenacity to keep on despite all the daunting obstacles that litter their onward path is what the film is all about. Without giving too much away, Tickled is less about tickling, and more about the simple act of finding out who has made a video of men tickling each other, and why. It's a supremely compelling story, even if it peters out somewhat in its rushed, indelicate final stages. Farrier, too, does the film no favours by trying to summarise what the film is really "about" in his sign-off, suggesting that he may not fully comprehend the richness of his own material. Even so, it really is a funny one. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Finally, someone made a documentary about tickling.

ENJOYMENT. Uh-oh. No they didn't.

IN RETROSPECT. A stranger-than-fiction voyage into that cultural abyss known as the internet.

The First Monday In May

Directed by ANDREW ROSSI Starring ANDREW BOLTON, ANNA WINTOUR, JOHN GALLIANO Released 30 SEPTEMBER

an fashion be viewed as art? That's the question at the centre of Andrew Rossi's documentary, the title of which refers to the annual event when New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art closes to host the Met Gala, a star-studded fundraiser celebrating the opening of a special exhibition by its Costume Institute. The exhibition in focus is 'China: Through the Looking Glass', which aims to explore the country's influence on Western fashion designers. Its curator, Andrew Bolton, acknowledges that critics may disparage its engagement with China as "inauthentic", but ultimately argues on behalf of the "extraordinary imagination" of the fashion industry.

Yet, it's this emphasis on imagination that makes the depiction of China so problematic. Instead of engaging with a very real and increasingly modern China, the exhibition is only interested in the Orientalist "fantasy" of its past - a tendency that's confronted in an awkward scene with a Chinese journalist who accuses Bolton's exhibition of dangerously omitting the modern realities of her homeland. It speaks volumes that Met Gala organiser Anna Wintour's only response is to whisper snarkily to Bolton that, "She just wants everything to start in 1949."

It's conflict like this that undoubtedly makes for the most interesting moments in an otherwise bland film. Just as Bolton and co fail to address the concerns of their Chinese critics in a politically sensitive way, so do the filmmakers in holding their subjects to account for it. Fashion is all about brushing over things; about wondering at the beautiful exterior while refusing to confront the myriad complexities - and at times ugliness - that lies beneath. Yes fashion may be beautiful, but it's all aesthetic, a pop star smiling into a sea of flashing cameras with dead, empty eyes. BETH PERKIN

ANTICIPATION. Is there really anything new to be found in the fashion film genre?

ENJOYMENT. How much did Rihanna get paid?! rehendaerest hilles.

IN RETROSPECT. All style, no substance.



Julieta

Directed by
PEDRO ALMODÓVAR
Starring
INMA CUESTA
ADRIANA UGARTE
EMMA SUÁREZ
Released
26 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

The director's last couple of films have not quite hit the target.



ENJOYMENT.

This one really does, but it takes a little while to notice just how cleanly and crisply.



IN RETROSPECT.

Almodóvar back to his very best.

f movies had cheeks, this one would be imprinted with a veritable roadmap of winding, mascara-caked tear stains. Pedro Almodóvar's Julieta is a hot red swoon. Its lips pursed, its face unreadable until the devastating yet revelatory closing frames, it softly veers between a hand-selected inventory of themes and emotions, handling each with the utmost of care and caution. The film's original title was Silencio (Silence), and it's perhaps a more evocative encapsulation of its core conceit: of people taking life-altering actions without first explaining and rationalising them to others.

Julieta (Emma Suárez) is a broken woman, all set to decamp from Madrid to Portugal with her art historian boyfriend in an attempt to whitewash over the memory of... something. A chance encounter on a street corner with an old friend of her daughter's, Antía, acts as the catalyst for a psychological deepclean. She pens a lengthy note which is visualised in flashback, detailing the curious story of Antía's conception and then pertinent episodes up to the present day. The film is based on three short stories by Canadian author Alice Munro, but Almodóvar has worked his magic to make this story feel at once sweeping and entirely cohesive.

2006's *Volver* was the director's last, flat-out great film, and this one is a welcome return to those exhilarating, neo-melodrama peaks. It's an intimate tale, at points even verging on the muted, which is particularly noticeable for a filmmaker who, in the past, has cherished the opportunity of whisking up bursts of unbridled passion. Yet this is a complete

work, whose many pleasures only become fully comprehensible when the final credits begin to roll. It's only at this climactic convergence point that you can see just how many plates the director was spinning all along.

The only clue that Almodóvar gives to the fact that something bigger lies ahead is the way the film is shot and stylised. Characters dress in loud garments which often run counter to their emotional state. They intone dialogue while perched in front of brash artworks that hang symbolically on apartment walls. Alberto Iglesias' cool jazz-inflected score is intricate and meandering, sliding surreptitiously between actions and words to lend the film the air of a tragic operetta. The form heightens and enhances the narrative rather than directly explaining what we should be feeling.

Mothers, disease, daughters, ghosts, estrangement, artists, comas, Rossy de Palma... On paper, it could only be more Almodóvar if it were filmed on scarlet satin. And yet with Julieta the director seems refreshed, in a mode of quiet contemplation and happy to be back toiling with human sensitivity at near-impolite close quarters. At its simplest, it's a film about how we deal with the unreadability of others, who themselves can undergo abrupt changes of heart. Instinct is the enemy of psychological wellbeing, and Julieta learns this the hard way. If we have the good fortune know that death is approaching, we can take the chance to make sure our books are all in order. DAVID JENKINS

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IN CINEMAS 28 OCTOBER



The Shallows

Directed by

JAUME COLLET-SERRA

Starring

BLAKE LIVELY

ÓSCAR JAENADA

BRETT CULLEN

Released

12 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

Jaume Collett-Serra is an excellent genre director and this shark movie looks fun.



ENJOYMENT.

Jaume Collet-Serra is an excellent genre director and this shark movie is fun!



IN RETROSPECT.

Is that all there is?

or a certain subset of film critics, the Catalanborn Jaume Collet-Serra – director of such niftier-than-predicted genre fare as *Orphan* and *Non-Stop* – is something of a (figurative) great white hope. *The Shallows*, which is a movie literally about a Great White (and hope), fully vindicates his cheering section, and at the same time, disappoints on a deeper level. It's just good enough that you only wish it was better.

Collet-Serra's great strength has always been his ability to smuggle an element of expressionism into his visual environment of his films: the melting homestead at the climax of 2005's House of Wax and the bombed-out hotel in 2011's Unknown describe realities violently dissolving in real time. The blue, crystalline ocean backdrop of The Shallows is his most beautifully suggestive on screen space yet, a secluded stretch of Mexican beach framed by rocky peaks that from the shore, look like the profile of a reclining, pregnant mountain goddess. Or at least, that's the verdict of Nancy (Blake Lively), who has come here to surf the same waters as her late mother 25 years earlier and also, as revealed during a phone conversation with her family, to run away from a life that's unexpectedly getting away from her, choice-by-choice. "How will you get back?" asks the local man (Oscar Jaenada) who's driven her there. When Nancy replies, "Uber," it's a funny line steeped in grimly ironic portent. We know she's going to be there for a while.

In a perfect world, posters and trailers wouldn't have spoiled the set-up and basic scenario of *The Shallows*, which is that Nancy ends up huddled and bleeding on a small outcropping two hundred yards

from shore – the feeding ground of a massive shark. The way that Collet-Serra shifts our perception of his setting from paradise to purgatory is impressive, with cinematographer Flavio Labiano toggling from sunblind daytime to greyscale dusk and back again as Nancy's ordeal drags on. The camera's fleet, weightless movement above, below and through the water, combined with some initially photorealistic special effects, hints at a truly ruthless thriller blending the authentic with the abstract. What follows, though, is less elegantly integrated than that. To use a highly subjective term, the second half of *The Shallows* is cheesy.

And cheesy is no bad thing. Even if we limit our examples to modern movies featuring killer sharks, Renny Harlin's *Deep Blue Sea* and David R Ellis' *Shark Night 3D* owned the phoniness of their special effects and had fun wringing variations on the basic stalk-and-swim visual language of *Jaws*. What hurts *The Shallows* is that Collet-Serra, whose real model here is the nature-as-crucible manoeuvres of *Gravity*, wants to have his stoic, realistically resourceful heroine and eat her too. The affecting metaphorical implications of the survival narrative dissipate as Nancy's battle with the monster grows more and more cartoonish.

There is entertaining spectacle here, but while it's superficially true that we haven't seen it all before – Spielberg might appreciate the way Nancy uses a buoy as a de facto shark cage – there's a nagging sense of a movie dutifully hitting its marks, even if they've been skilfully hidden beneath the waves.



The Spanish genre master on directing, working with SFX and why *Orphan* is so funny.

n a moment when any halfway competent hired gun is exalted as a new-style auteur, the Barcelona-born Jaume Collet-Serra seems like an actually credible candidate for critical contemplation. Starting with his intermittently startling 2005 remake of *House of Wax*, he has cultivated an expressionistic, carefully colour-coded aesthetic in genre forms from horror (*Orphan*) to cloak-and-dagger mystery (*Unknown*) to action (*Non-Stop, Run All Night*). In his new thriller *The Shallows*, he slyly intercedes into Hollywood blockbuster history by setting up a *Jaws*-style sacrificial victim (Blake Lively in surfwear) and then watching the blonde outlast the shark, one close encounter at a time.

LWLies: Do you consider yourself a "genre filmmaker," or is it just the way it's worked out with the sorts of projects you get attached to? Collet-Serra: It's not a coincidence. It takes me a year or a year and a half to make a movie, so it would be a long coincidence. It's what I like. I think genre films usually have challenges in them – a concept that's interesting but difficult

to explain to the audience. Or you're keeping a secret, maybe. Or it's one location, with one actor. Those are the kinds of films that I like, with 2 or 3 moving pieces, or playing notes over and over.

The Shallows is on one level very concrete—it's about problem-solving—but also has an abstract element. The essence of directing is that you're directing more than one thing at a time. There are a lot of balls in the air. The more experience you get, the more balls you can keep up. When I started, I would do a scene and it would be about one thing. 'This scene is about this character,' and that's it. In The Shallows, there isn't a lot of room—there isn't anybody for her to talk to or react to. I wanted it to feel real. We put a lot of work into that character, building her slowly through the movie, and it paid off.

the description of the mountains around the water as looking like a reclining, pregnant woman is very evocative. I wanted a location with a rock formation, mostly to give a sense of geography. When we found this place, we felt like we had an opportunity to express something about the character, and we improvised things. That's one of the things that came out of it. When you do that sort of thing a lot, you discard 90 per cent of the moments. Then you keep the right ones that help you to tell the story. When we shot it, we didn't know if it would stay in. It was day two of shooting, we could have had a lot of other chances to express that connection between the character and the island. As the shooting progressed, we realised it was one we wanted to keep. We were lucky, but that's because we were looking for it.

There isn't a lot of irony in the movie. No.

In a situation like this, faced with choices that need to seem realistic, I had to put myself in that situation too. I never try to teach a lesson. If I was in that situation, I would die in two seconds, because I'm not a doctor. Visually, things go into very movie-ish territory, but you go with her and it's like she's earned it – and then to try to teach a lesson, or to be ironic... it would be going too far in a movie this simple.

Is there more humour or irony in a movie like House of Wax or Orphan? With House of Wax, I didn't know what I was doing. I was like 28 years old.

Orphan is fascinating: it's about trauma but it's also very funny. I try to put humour in sometimes. I try to go against the grain now, but I was younger and felt less restraint. You put amusing things in without seeing the effect on the big picture. Humour is great in genre movies, though, because it can humanise things. In Orphan, there is the moment where Vera slaps the girl and I felt like the audience needed her to slap a kid. That's very hard. It's usually violent, and you wonder if they needed to do that, it's very off-putting. Our audience clapped when she slapped her. To get the audience clapping when a grown woman slaps a kid means that they really hate that little girl. To get them to that point is the whole point of the movie. Even at that point, they don't know the secret, but you're still putting them in a position they don't expect. You use every trick to get them there - desperation and humour. The humour in Orphan is in that relationship, and it's dark, but I enjoyed it 🚷





The Blue Room

Directed by MATHIEU AMALRIC
Starring MATHIEU AMALRIC, LÉA DRUCKER,
STÉPHANIE CLÉAU
Released 9 SEPTEMBER

This chilling miniature from actor and some-time director Mathieu Amalric, adapted from a 1964 novel by Georges Simenon, dispenses with the screw-turning mechanics of the traditional murder mystery to ask one question: what is it like to feel guilty? In fact, the question is more like, feeling guilty is awful, but how awful? Amalric's Julien Gahyde, a goatee'd, apparently decent farming machinery rep, meets intoxicating, sexually voracious pharmacist's wife, Esther (Stéphanie Cléau), in a hotel room whose walls are painted a calming shade of deep blue. A tacit pact to dispense with their current partners turns sour, as the idyll of the blue room is revealed as a flashback to happier times. In the present, Julien is being questioned for a crime we must assume is linked to the pact.

The particulars of the case are revealed in curt but evocative fashion, Amalric enhancing this simple yarn by allowing his camera to pick up salient side details and observations. A drop of jam falling onto a laptop acts as a reminder of a particularly wild liaison where unchecked passion leads to mild blood-letting. A magistrate removes a picture of his wife from his desk while questioning Julian, perhaps to prevent rubbing salt into the weeping wound, or maybe as an admission of his own guilt. A typist taking down the confessions is shocked by what she's hearing. Amalric drifts through the film with a stultified gaze, as if the landscape is scattered with reminders of his sins. The film suggests that true love requires a drastic affirmation, that it's not enough to just make a simple decision to move on with a new phase of life. There's an undertow of conservatism, though, as it claims that infidelity can cause suffering in ways which can seldom be anticipated. Maybe it's that we're ill equipped to respond to our own depression in the honourable cause of maintaining the illusion of happiness. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Amalric's a great actor. His career as a director has been... interesting.

3

ENJOYMENT.

His best film as a director.

0

IN RETROSPECT. Small (runs at 72 mins) but perfectly formed. Bursting with melancholy insight.



Jim: The James Foley Story

Directed by BRIAN OAKES
Released 2 SEPTEMBER

n 2014, American journalist James Foley was kidnapped by ISIS militants in Syria. After a period of imprisonment and torture, he was executed on camera. The image of Foley in an orange jumpsuit, a hooded figure looming over him, has become permanently etched in our collective consciousness. For many who had never heard of Foley prior to his death, his life was defined by that terrible act. Director Brian Oakes seeks to remedy that.

Jim: The James Foley Story isn't a hard-hitting piece of journalism. It doesn't need to be. Although Foley's reports from Libya and Syria are included throughout, much of the running time is devoted to interviews with Foley's family and colleagues. They paint an intimate portrait of a restless figure, one who struggled with the banality of ordinary life in suburban New Hampshire. His friends in the field underline Foley's work ethic and empathy: his determination to shine a light on atrocities in conflict zones; his difficulty coming to terms with the boundaries of journalistic distance; his occasional tendency towards macho aggression. His death made him into a political martyr. This documentary is a poignant attempt to articulate and reclaim that loss.

The second half of the documentary focuses on the photojournalists held captive alongside Foley in Syria. The filmmakers emulate the dimly lit, oppressive spaces in which they were imprisoned. The former inmates talk about their experiences trying to establish some semblance of a life – playing games, celebrating Christmas – amid the worst possible conditions. Their testimonies are interspersed with shadowy re-enactments of the torture they endured, made all the more distressing by the fact that we never see any violence in detail, leaving us to imagine the worst. Unsurprisingly, this is the most harrowing part of the documentary. But equally, as they talk about the strength they drew from Foley's presence, it also manages to be its most moving. **CATHERINE KARELLIS**

ANTICIPATION. The first full-length exploration of James Foley's life - directed by one of his closest friends.



ENJOYMENT. An emotive portrait of the impact Foley had on the people he left behind.



IN RETROSPECT. An important reminder of why we need conflict journalists – and the dangers they face.







Imperium

Directed by DANIEL RAGUSSIS
Starring DANIEL RADCLIFFE, TONI COLLETTE,
BURN GORMAN
Released 23 SEPTEMBER

There's an old internet adage known as 'Godwin's Law' which posits that the longer an online debate goes on, the greater the probability a comparison with Hitler and/or Nazism becomes. It's what's known more commonly, at least in offline parlance, as a conversation killer. It doesn't bode well for writer/director Daniel Ragussis, therefore, that his debut feature opens with an extract from 'Mein Kampf'; even less so that the full citation is agonisingly teased out for maximum shock value. Indeed, "words build bridges into unexplored regions" is the sort of quote you might expect to find in a clickbait listicle entitled '20 Surprisingly Inspirational Quotes from History's Greatest Shitbags', although the manner in which it is deployed here somehow feels even more cynical and glib than that. But then *Imperium*, it turns out, was co-written by a bloke called Michael German. Make of that what you will.

That eyebrow-curling opener aside, the film sets out its stall as a serious, sensitive look at the uglier side of American nationalism. Bookish FBI agent Nate Foster (Radcliffe) is sent in to infiltrate a radical terrorist group who may or may not be plotting a major attack in DC. A truckload of caesium (bad stuff) has gone AWOL and Foster's superior, Angela Zamparo (Toni Collette), has a hunch that some local skinheads might be involved. As with most undercover cop movies, everything goes according to plan until it doesn't, which makes for suspenseful viewing. Yet while *Imperium* works as a taut character-driven thriller, it is less successful as a State of the Union address on the issue of homegrown extremism (its most compelling, albeit seemingly inadvertent, statement is that domestic intelligence is less a game of cat and mouse than pin the tail on the terrorist). A film starring Daniel Radcliffe as a rookie fed deep undercover in a white supremacist cell was always likely to stray towards superficial provocation. But here's the real bombshell: he's astonishingly good. ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. Daniel Radcliffe: nice kid, not the world's greatest actor.

ENJOYMENT.

Hitler's ghost! Give that man an Oscar.

IN RETROSPECT. A solid police procedural and nothing more than that.

3



Café Society

Directed by WOODY ALLEN
Starring JESSE EISENBERG, KRISTEN STEWART,
STEVE CARELL
Released 2 SEPTEMBER

What if, at that crucial juncture in our lives, we had chosen one path instead of another? In movies, that alternative reality can be lived vicariously, and without experiencing the messy fallout. The cheerfully archaic *Café Society* pairs up Kristen Stewart and Jesse Eisenberg as low-level functionaries in 1930s Hollywood, and then follows on from the moment where their burgeoning romance suddenly, cruelly falls to pieces. The plot takes the form of a figure-8 pattern, two strands looping outwards, crossing in the middle and then meeting at the (heartbreaking) climax.

As with much late Woody Allen, the philosophical idea nestled at the core of this sweet comedic runaround is far more interesting than the way in which it is expressed. Sure, he knows how to throw together a superficially enjoyable movie, one that rattles along and covers all the required bases: every scene begins and ends at the point it should; jokes linger on for no longer than they are needed; superfluous information is the devil. Yet sometimes you can see, hear and feel the utter lack of joy he takes in making that journey from point A to point B. A narration which he intones himself introduces the audience to the Tinseltown jet set. It is so rote in its observations that you'd be forgiven for thinking he'd pinched it from his own *Radio Days, Zelig* or *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

There's no such slackness from veteran cinematographer Vittoro Storaro, who frames the gaudy, gilded stucco palaces of the moneyed west coast with a ghostly precision, locating clean lines in a dazzling mess of high style. With its central theme of lost beauty and unfulfilled desire, the film counterpoints the characters muffled depression with lustrous décor and elaborate lighting schemes. It's designed like a golden nugget, with thick shafts of light shimmering through window blinds, and interior surfaces made to glimmer alluringly. Still, mid-table Woody is better than the A-game of most other journeyman hacks. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION.

It's that time of year again...

4

ENJOYMENT. Ponderous and light, though it comes into its own with the heartening climax.



IN RETROSPECT.

Bittersweet period Woody. Fine.



El Sur (1983)

Directed by
VICTOR ERICE
Starring
OMERO ANTONUTTI
SONSOLES ARANGUREN
ICÍAR BOLLAÍN
Released
16 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

A revisit of Victor Erice's little seen second film.



ENJOYMENT.

Often called one of the great Spanish films, but may be time to lose that geographic qualifier.



IN RETROSPECT.

Perfection.

hen you hear stories of overzealous producers interrupting or sometimes scuppering the pure vision of a film director, it's rare that you'd be inclined to side with the callous businessman over the consumate artist. In the case of Victor Erice's 1983 film, El Sur (The South), the battle lines are less clear cut. Erice had originally planned a three hour film, the first half set in northern Spain, the second in southern Spain, both amounting to a sombre reflection of the early years of the Franco regime. However, the opening 90 minute chapter was deemed so great, that it was simply not necessary to continue filming. Further funding was duly cut and the film signed off.

Granted, we now only have the 50 per cent of what is officially an uncompleted feature, and yet, it's hard to imagine how this could've vaulted to an even higher plateau of greatness. Every frame is calculated to perfection and loaded with depth and passion. The film ends at a perfect moment, where the south becomes an unseen paradise, a place we can dream about but will never encounter. On its surface there's nothing obviously radical about Erice's second film (after his classic 1973 debut The Spirit of the Beehive). And yet it manages to be unlike anything else. It sits unassumingly between a melancholic family saga like Vincente Minnelli's Meet Me in St Louis, and Terence Davies' impressionistic remembrance of a working class family railing against its staunchly aggressive patriarch, Distant Voices, Still Lives.

The father figure in *El Sur* (Omero Antonutti's Agustín) isn't aggressive. He's taciturn and distant, sometimes blind to the needs of his young daughter,

Estrella, who wants to swaddle him in love. He has found himself on the wrong side of history, a political casualty of the Spanish Civil War and unable to find consolation in a dim future. He requires time alone with his thoughts, perhaps trying to unravel what went wrong, or what action he could take to ensure the wellbeing of his family. The film offers a child's-eye-view of depression, and as such, only shows what Estrella can see, and proposes what she is thinking.

She finds the name of a small-time movie actress scrawled on a scrap of paper in her father's office. One evening she also discovers his motorbike parked outside the local cinema which happens to be screening a movie in which this enigmatic starlet features. Speculation as to the rightful owner of her father's heart ensues - does he pine for this actress, or for his obedient, low maintenance wife? The story unfurls like a dream diary, yet Erice - in the most delicate fashion imaginable - coaxes out the ambiguities, the mis-read feelings, the muffled acrimony, the encroaching disaster, the deathly impulses, the raw poetry of life. Ravel and Schubert are deployed with subtle mastery across melancholic slow-fades. Beyond his ability to find emotion without ever resorting to melodrama, Erice captures how time slips away from us, changes things, propels us towards an abyss. El Sur is a film about how we construe time as being relative to human interaction. He says we should measure it in relation to how long we have to spend with those we love. The great tragedy is, as long as free will and psychological fragility exists, we'll never be able to think in those terms. DAVID JENKINS



The Clan

Directed by
PABLO TRAPERO
Starring
GUILLERMO FRANCELLA
PETER LANZANI
LILI POPOVICH
Released
16 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

A dark crime saga from Argentinian auteur Pablo Trapero.



ENJOYMENT.

Curiously inert for such purportedly thrilling subject matter.



IN RETROSPECT.

The real-life story is remarkable; the film is disappointingly dull.

s far as variations on a theme go, the twisted bourgeois crime family is a fairly familiar fixture. Pablo Trapero's *The Clan* doesn't stray too far from expectation, focusing on the activities of an infamous Argentinian family called the Puccios. In reality, they were freelance kidnappers, obtaining ransoms from wealthy families and then brutally murdering the hostages. Victims were chained in bathtubs or basements, while the teenagers inside claimed not to know or hear their cries for help. Yet in Trapero's hands, this naturally dramatic subject matter is rendered strangely inert — he chooses to focus on the tried and true father/son dynamic and eludes the more pressing questions at play.

The Puccios are led by Arquimedes (Guillermo Francella), a white-haired patriarch with vaguely sepulchral features. He expects unerring obedience from his children. Older son Alex (Peter Lanzani) is his father's main accomplice – and an unlikely one too. He's a popular, pleasant-looking twenty something and a professional rugby player, playing for Argentina's national team. He's ambivalent about his role in the kidnappings, but nonetheless helps to lure one of his well-off rugby teammates into his father's trap. In real life the man was only 23. He was found shot dead a few months later.

Set in a drab, autumnal suburb, the film jumps across a period between 1979 and 1985. It was a transitional time in Argentina's history, as a seven-year military junta came to a close. The Puccios are closely connected to the regime, and share the same ugliness, moral cowardice and yen for extra-

judicial killing; as the dictatorship runs out of luck, so too does the family. These parallels go some way to suggest how private citizens and government officials colluded in forced 'disappearances'.

Trapero gives much attention to the sedate setting of the Puccio family home, adopting a cramped, claustrophobic style as they say grace around the dinner table or watch television together. Arquimedes kisses his teenage daughters goodnight and helps them with their homework. Sociopaths are nice to their families too, aren't they? It's nothing that hasn't been expressed before. Queasy tracking shots aside, the interesting issues elude Trapero. What about Mrs Puccio? Does she simply make dinner for the hostages and clean their blood from the bathroom floors? We don't know – she gets barely more than a handful of lines.

The camera remains in close proximity to its subjects, but the film never gets inside them – it offers the illusion of depth. The icily ruthless dad, cowardly son, and near-silent mother are all established and then given no further depths to plumb. It flattens what should be compelling.

Trapero saves the most shocking jolts for the concluding moments, squeezing a police raid, suicide attempt and a ton of post-credit information into the final ten minutes. By this point it all seems of little consequence – protracted throughout, and then suddenly rushed. It takes a special sort of tone-deafness to deliver fascinating material so clumsily. The Clan works to create a world of murky amorality, but the drama is so neutered that it's hard to care. CHRISTINA NEWLAND



War On Everyone

Directed by
JOHN MICHAEL MCDONAGH
Starring
ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD,
MICHAEL PEÑA
STEPHANIE SIGMAN
Released
30 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

John Michael McDonagh's previous, The Guard and Calvary, were terrific.



ENJOYMENT.

A different kind of animal. Peña and Skarsgård are a laugh-riot.



IN RETROSPECT.

A very, very strange film...

he unlikely pairing of Alexander Skarsgård and Michael Peña proves irresistible in this ramshackle crime caper from Irish writer/director John Michael McDonagh. They play Bob Bolaño and Terry Monroe, a couple of loose-cannon detectives with an unorthodox approach to cleaning up the streets of Albuquerque – namely strewing them with broken beer bottles and bullets. "Let's go fuck some scumbags," is how Skarsgård's Glen Campbell-loving cowboy copper reacts when handed their latest (and potentially last) assignment: prevent an impending race track robbery involving a couple of small-time crooks and a small cadre of unsavoury businessmen.

With its sunny New Mexico setting and pseudo-philosophical banter between two corrupt protagonists (surely the best send-up of True Detective's Rust Cohle and Marty Hart yet), War on Everyone ostensibly has more in common with Martin McDonagh's Seven Psychopaths than John Michael's two previous films, Calvary and The Guard. As a comedy it's certainly less effective, never fully convincing as either a pastiche of '70s buddy cop movies or a pitch-black procedural. As a piece of cinematic commentary, however, this is by far the more cohesive work - "these things live or die by the script" observes a local Irish reprobate/police informant while watching a subpar porno that's all action and no plot.

As fun as it is watching Bob and Terry indulge in blackmail, frequent visits to strip clubs and resort to using excessive force wherever necessary, especially when it isn't remotely called for, their methods lend the film a slight melancholy edge. These guys aren't just dyed-in-the-wool mavericks, cruising around in a gleaming turquoise Oldsmobile Cutlass in their pristine three-piece suits, sinking suds and scoping out their next suspect, but relics from a bygone era of US law enforcement where the rulebook was more or less open to interpretation.

Despite being reprimanded by their commanding officer whenever they step too far out of line, there are no real consequences for their actions; if anything their brazen disregard of basic protocol feels like a cry for help. Like a drunker, saltier Starsky and Hutch, they are, in essence, hopelessly obsolete.

Though it does occasionally feel as if the supporting cast are reading from different scripts, War on Everyone also boasts an enjoyably hammy turn from Theo James as a British baddie with an insatiable bloodlust, while the ever-reliable Tessa Thompson helps redress the hormone imbalance as Terry's latest squeeze. That said, it's a shame to see Miss Bala's Stephanie Sigman given so little to work with, and we really could have done without Caleb Landry Jones rocking up doing his usual loose-limbed, mannered flamboyance routine.

Not an entirely clean kill, then, but at least the zany narrative – a quick stopover in Iceland appears to take Bob and Terry as much by surprise as it does the audience – throws us off the scent just long enough to keep us invested in the pair's wacky shenanigans. ADAM WOODWARD



Wiener-Dog

Directed by
TODD SOLONDZ
Starring
CHARLIE TAHAN
GRETA GERWIG
DANNY DEVITO
Released
12 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

 $Todd\ Solondz's\ films$ are often furry good.



ENJOYMENT.

Woof!



IN RETROSPECT.

Looking bark, some great tails in there.

erd loser extraordinaire Dawn Wiener first appeared in Todd Solondz' 1995 film, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*. Fortunately, her return in the director's latest, *Wiener-Dog*, is no sentimental homage. Indeed, recently asked whether he was worried the new film would tarnish Dawn's legacy, Solondz rejected the notion, explaining that Dawn is, 'just a character', and one towards whom he didn't feel any great sense of responsibility.

Greta Gerwig's take on Dawn has more in common with her character from *Frances Ha* than it does with the original incarnation. Animated by an admirable and touching sense of moral duty and optimism, she heroically faces up to seemingly insurmountable circumstances, striving to communicate with people whose cruelty appears, in turn, to be concealing profound melancholy and pain.

Yet it's the eponymous dog that links the stories and characters. The film opens with a reference to dogs as man's best friend, and the progression from one segment to the next is in turn dictated by the dog's movement and by how willing the characters are to treat the dog in accordance with that statement. In Solondz' cruel, nihilistic world, the utterance of such a well-intentioned and clichéd idea can only infer imminent suffering for the dog. The culmination of the first story, depicting an outright rejection of the dog by a typical suburban family, proves to be one of the film's most successful, amusing and bleak moments.

Yet the piecemeal structure of the film dilutes any sustained emotional investment. Too long to be approached as episodes, too short to completely get past the almost pat Solondz-isms, they seem much more powerful in isolation. The juxtaposition of stories appears increasingly arbitrary and they don't build up to anything particularly meaningful. Although proceedings seem to gravitate towards the promise of more and more cruelty, disappointment and, in the end, death, this development appears artificial and forced.

Wiener-Dog nevertheless remains enjoyable as a series of unrelated but striking vignettes. Solondz reminds us with Gerwig's sequence that he mastered the formula for disagreeable awkwardness long before it (and Gerwig) became a mandatory convention of American indie cinema. His characteristic sense for well placed moments of physical violence also remains intact, as does his talent for creating three dimensional characters who are likeable and pathetic in equal measure. The film is worth watching alone for Tracy Letts' performance as an awful LA dad, and for Ellen Burstyn, who brings levity and dark humour to a climactic sequence that borders on the macabre.

Indeed, it is the performances which bring this comically abstracted version of the Todd Solondz film universe to life. And yet, reduced to their bare elements – cynicism, heartbreak, cruelty and violence – the characterisations lack a human touch. The simplicity means that the film is more successful as an exercise in style than it is as a gripping observation of the real world. While 1998's *Happiness* and *Dollhouse* were similarly concerned with blinkered characters – self-centred sometimes to the point of madness – *Wiener-Dog* pushes this further as it adopts the rather limiting and absurdist point of view of the titular dog, a detached, whimpering observer. **ELENA LAZIC**



Captain Fantastic

Directed by
MATT ROSS
Starring
VIGGO MORTENSEN
FRANK LANGELLA
KATHRYN HAHN
Released
9 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

If Viggo gave it the seal of approval, that's good enough for us.



ENJOYMENT.

He's better than the film he's starring in



IN RETROSPECT.

Lot's of mixed messages, little in the way of excitement.

his mildly eccentric cross-country caper is complicated by its attempts say something profound about life. Writer-director Matt Ross wants to show that the battle for moral superiority can only be won if everyone is open to deep and detailed criticism. We are all tainted and no-one is perfect, particularly those who believe they are. Viggo Mortensen plays log cabin liberal, Ben, a bearded Haight-Ahsbury throwback with an impressive wardrobe of vintage Democrat Party campaign tees who is out to prove that existence outside of the commercialised mainstream is not only possible but preferable.

He imposes staunch ideals onto his six brighteyed, bushy-tailed kids, forcing a bowie knife in to one hand, and a textbook on political science in to the other. *Captain Fantastic* offers a cool critique of the nurturing process, presenting the pros and cons of raising little ones in our image. It asks whether children should exist as footsoldiers who must abide by parental order. And if so, what if this cultural force-feeding is actually teaching them about freedom of expression and the joys of independence?

The family's woodland idyll is ruptured when matriarch Leslie is pronounced dead, and Ben must usher his brood into a tattered, modifed school bus so they can hit the road and prevent her ageing conservative parents from giving her the Christian burial she never wanted. Mortensen's Ben is like a Manson Family acolyte, one part peace-loving beatnik, another part deranged psychopath. He's not murderous or anything like that, but he's so

self-engaged and ingrained in his opinions that it's his way or the highway. It's almost as if he's fighting a one-man war with the non-believers who represent the evils of capitalism, religion and intellecual ignorance.

Yet the film itself is far less impressive than its conflicted central character, as in order to make sure that Ben can retain a measure of empathy, Ross uses the people he meets along the road as single-note figures of fun. A stop-over with his sister-in-law (Kathryn Hahn) allows him to display his children's emotional maturity. Her sons are slack-jawed, computer game-loving dolts, whereas his pre-teen daughter is able to wax analytical about the American Bill of Rights. It's hard to disagree with the idea that book smarts have their value, it's just a shame it's presented in such an obvious and contrived manner.

Elsewhere, an after-dark sortie involves one daughter employing her hunting prowess to clamber up onto the roof of grandpa's mini mansion to rescue Ben's briefly estranged son. We learn that skills perfected in the forest don't necessarily translate to the flat-pack suburbs, duh. Yet at this point Ross nudges Ben's egotism over the edge, inferring that he's so intent on preserving his ideals that he's willing to place the lives of his children in mortal peril. A sucky sub-plot also suggests that we can't learn about real human interactions through books. It's a film which tries to say something interesting, but spends too much time squirming, flip-flopping and working out how it can pass comment without causing too much offence. DAVID JENKINS





















The Childhood of a Leader

Directed by
BRADY CORBET
Starring
TOM SWEET
BÉRÉNICE BEJO
LIAM CUNNINGHAM
Released
19 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

We are avid followers of the Pattinsonasance.



ENJOYMENT.

Works in spite of showy stylistic choices, not because of them.



IN RETROSPECT.

Ambitious period fantasy that poses existential questions about those we call monsters.

he title of a movie often sits out on its own. When a story starts, it drifts to the back of the mind. Not this one, though. This one imposes a forceful twist on every frame. Actor Brady Corbet's directorial debut has been adapted from Jean-Paul Sartre's 1939 short story of the same name. It is about a 10-year-old boy growing up in a loveless, authoritarian household. The boy's future as a fascist leader is not the focus of the film. Were it not for the title's ominous foreshadowing, this would be about the childhood of an emotionally damaged adult. It would demand a complex form of sympathy.

As things stand, sympathy becomes thoughtful confusion. Questions hover like vultures. Where on a timeline starting with innocence and ending with evil-doing does a person lose the right to compassion? We're in France in 1918. The child is angelic-looking, girlish-bob-sporting Prescott (Tom Sweet) who is already throwing rocks at adults. The Father (Liam Cunningham) is a high-ranking US diplomat who is too preoccupied with his own work to spare a thought for his family's needs. The Mother (Bérénice Bejo) is cold, imperious and broken. She never wanted a child. She never even wanted to be a wife.

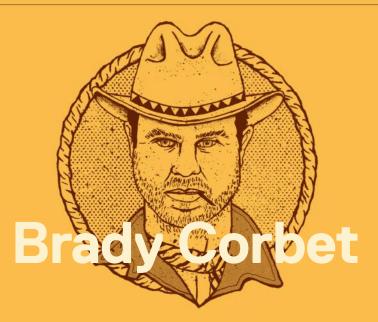
All the characters bar Prescott deliver their lines creepy stiffness. It could be mistaken for bad acting, were it not so consistent. The family and their servants occupy a high-ceilinged mansion that production designer, Jean-Vincent Puzos, has turned into an elegantly wasted cavern. A near-empty bedroom has a wall painted in burnished gold. Elsewhere, the décor reflects status, but personal effects scarcely exist. The only thing that

enlivens this lavish prison is the slamming of doors and shouting. There is no laughter, no happiness, no compassion – only a hauteur as deeply set as rigor mortis.

In the absence of warmer emotions, each scene becomes a battle of wills. Little Tom Sweet is fabulous as a brooding firecracker in miniature form. Unlike the grinning and malevolent young subject of Lynne Ramsay's We Need To Talk About Kevin, he is easily hurt, and each emotional or literal blow landed by his parents causes obvious pain. It is how he immediately translates that pain to stubborn vengeance that enables you to imagine what kind of an adult he will become. The set-up is fascinating and the tension is increasingly grotesque. Yet there are many plodding stretches which Corbet doesn't succeed in concealing by inserting wild camera movements combined with Scott Walker's bleak, juddering orchestral score. This music feels like possessed black stallions galloping to hell. It bludgeons you with loud, brash, hysterical horror.

Stacy Martin, star of Lars Von Trier's Nymphomaniac, pops up to heighten the domestic tension and have her body catalyse a bizarre sexual moment. Robert Pattinson has two roles that comprise fifteen minutes of screen-time combined. His presence endorses rather than enables this winningly strange vision. Corbet doesn't know what to do with the monster he has built and the result is an underwhelming ending, but the existential intrigue that came before still casts a long and dark shadow.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



The American actor turned director sounds off about his deep love of shooting on 35mm film.

think 99 per cent of movies these days look like they were put through an Instagram filter. I feel like Instagram really changed the way people think of images has because now they see how easy it is to filter and re-filter and blah blah blah. And then they go to the cinema and are like, 'Oh, they just turned everything blue.' There's never a sense of, 'Oh, that's what that space actually looked like.' For *The Childhood of a Leader* we were shooting in very low lighting conditions and then we were pushing the stock afterwards. We were really taking as much grain out of the negative as possible so that there would be this earthiness to the image.

I heard a story the other day from a friend of mine shooting a film in Australia on 35mm, and apparently there's one guy in the whole of the country who does processing. And he was on holiday. So it meant she was in this really awkward situation where she might have had to have the unexposed film X-rayed or scanned and basically wiped. So it was this

terrible situation where she had no money, but she had to stay and wait for this one guy to come back. We shot the film in Hungary, and one of the reasons we did that was because they have not one but two labs that are very up to date and very good. I'm hoping that on my next film a new lab opens up in New York, because the sole existing lab shut down and now there's one that's supposed to be coming back. But it's always two months, two months, two months. So I'm waiting to hear.

I think that movies are meant to last forever. So I don't know why anyone would want to shoot on a format that is gonna look so fucking dated, even by the time it comes out. When I'm looking at a film like Max Ophüls' Lola Montes, it's a movie that's going to last forever. I would say that a lot of the images being created today are disposable, and that's how I relate to them. I don't take them seriously. Here's the thing: when I go and watch a DCP, all I'm seeing is a giant laptop, and sometimes you even see the play button. So I'm like, why do I want to go to the movies to watch something I could watch at home, but just a little bit smaller? If someone's screening a print I'm gonna see a much better looking image. The blacks will be truer, the information and the colour will be richer. That sends me to the cinema. Everyone's complaining about the death of people going out to the movies. In some very, very subliminal way, I think people are just feeling less impressed by it. And the reason they are less impressed is that they have images that were easy to produce, and were basically painted digitally.

I'm not completely dogmatic. Jonathan Glazer's Under the Skin is, for me, the most important digital movie to come out in many, many years. Because he is doing something that not only functions on a dramatic level, but on a theoretical level too. In that case, the form really is the content, and those images feel vital because they're intrinsically linked together. I don't think that very many people think that much, or that hard, as someone like Jonathan Glazer thinks about how and why a film is made like it is. Jonathan is the kind of person who knows exactly what he's doing, so I am always happy to be taken down the path by someone like that. So, it's not to say that I would never shoot a film on a digital format for a very specific reason. But for me the baseline is celluloid and digital is everything else.

With digital, you don't have that impression of sunlight being captured inside a box. It used to be a miracle to see a perfect performance with a perfect shaft of light. It used to be that when a camera would push through a doorway it felt like God himself was following the character. We're getting to a place where viewers are getting more and more passive and easier to please. Like, 'It's nice because it's red and it's blue', so everything is just kind of suffering from it's own too-muchness. But the best looking movies of the last 10 years - we're talking about something like Paul Thomas Anderson's The Master - could never have been shot digitally. It would have been a joke. The Master is a movie that is going to last forever because of its commitment to image making



The Free State of Jones

Directed by
GARY ROSS
Starring
MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
KERI RUSSELL
GUGU MBATHA-RAW
Released
9 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

'From the director of The Blind Side...'



ENJOYMENT.

White Guilt: The Movie.



IN RETROSPECT.

Easy enough to dismiss, but the deeper implications are a genuine cause for concern.

ust as the American Civil War was not fought to end slavery (it was fought to defend it), nor was slavery resigned to the history books the moment General Robert E Lee surrendered to Ulysses S Grant at the Battle of Appomattox Court House. Any historian worth their salt will tell you this, and yet for too long and with very few exceptions, Hollywood has chosen to explore this dark chapter in US history in binary terms. *The Free State of Jones* is pitched as a more nuanced picture of the struggle between white masters and black slaves, but crucially it retains an all-too familiar perspective.

The hero of this story is Newton Knight (Matthew McConaughey), a poor farmer from southern Mississippi who led an interracial rebellion against the Confederacy. It would be churlish to deny the courageousness or conviction of his deeds, but it's probably fair to say that Knight was a disenfranchised deserter and a canny outlaw rather than a forwardthinking civil rights crusader. That he ended up on the right side of history was as much down to personal circumstance as any virtuous principles he is presumed to have held, and accordingly, it is both disappointing and predictable that he should be the focus of such heavily romanticised hagiography. McConaughey is a fine actor, but the task of persuasively delivering dialogue as callous in sentiment as, "We're all somebody's nigger" to a group of predominantly white yeomen proves too great even for him.

Where things really get curious, however, is in the absurdly chaste depiction of Knight's relationship with a "house negro" named Rachel (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) – the film's only black female character of any note, in

reality once the property of Knight's grandfather but crudely reimagined here as some sort of Manic Pixie Slave Girl. Knight first meets Rachel when she is sent to aid his sick infant son, and from this moment a simmering sexual tension builds between them. Later, long after Knight has abandoned his wife, Serena (Keri Russell), and the war is won, he and Rachel start a family of their own. Their intimacy is strongly implied, yet we never actually see them display any physical affection towards one another. It's almost as if director Gary Ross is trying to make a point of not broaching this particular taboo, yet in doing so he draws attention to it in a far more conspicuous manner than if he'd simply shown them sharing a tender embrace.

Even when the film appears less daunted in its chronicling of this violent period of seismic social chang, the results are no less confounding. Knight takes a stand against the contemptuous bureaucrats who conspire to deny the freed men their newly acquired rights to vote. This makes him a pariah, but the sacrifices he makes are trivial when compared to those of other fringe character like Mahershala Ali's Moses, whose brutal lynching is used as emotional leverage to further lionise Knight. Tellingly, The Free State of Jones does not use this opportunity to examine the legacy of the abolition of slavery from an African-American perspective, but incredibly continues unabashed in its appropriation of black history via intermittent flash forwards to a bizarre court room case involving Knight's great-great-great grandson. There's a compelling story in here somewhere, but it's buried under a mountain of moral grandstanding and white guilt.

ADAM WOODWARD



Behemoth

Directed by
ZHAO LIANG
Released
19 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

Chinese documentarian Zhao Liang is little known, but his films are highly acclaimed.



ENJOYMENT.

A poetic and disruptive look at modern manual labour.



IN RETROSPECT.

Rich, deep and eventually very moving.

his is a film which lambasts Chinese cultural imperialism in the harshest terms possible. It accuses a giant excavation project for fossil fuels of creating a literal hellscape on Earth. At one point a camera glides silently along an underground mineshaft before a sudden, terrifying explosion shakes it and the walls around it. After a moment of confusion, it becomes clear that a dynamite charge from the surface is the cause of the rumble, but it could just as well have been the Devil stamping his clawed feet.

Director Zhao Liang heads to rural Mongolia where energy companies insouciantly lay waste to rolling meadow lands. They claim to cheerfully provide jobs for locals with their ecologically ruinous open caste coal mines. Yet unskilled villagers scavenge for nuggets of coke with little more than decorative rags to prevent the dust particles from entering into their bodies and causing chronic emphysema. They head back to their hovels to live out a drab existence, with much of their down-time dedicated to washing off the black grime that cakes their bodies. They're sustained on a thin broth with limp greens floating on the surface. They have nothing to talk about and no form of entertainment. They sit and contemplate. And then they're back to work.

Zhao's miraculous film is extremely simple in its political aims. It frames capitalist enterprise as uncaring and also clueless as to the desires of its rank and file collaborators. Though the camera often comes extremely close to its human subjects, a psychological distance is always maintained. Communication is a no-no. Zhao doesn't want to

hear gripes, excuses or explanations. That these things he films are happening means that someone, somewhere has flashed the green light. He just wants to watch as the untainted truth unfolds in front of him. He toys with the form, including the occasional fictional insert of a naked wanderer observing the desolation from afar. Sometimes, the manner in which he films a subject transforms it into something otherworldly. At a steel mill, a river of molten metal fills the screen with an intense blotch of glowing orange-red, emphasising the film's connection to some kind of fiery underworld.

As the film progresses, its scope expands. Zhao shifts his focus from the workers themselves to the world in which they are supposed to exist. The utopian vision of a workers' paradise is angrily mocked, as an entire metropolis erected on the Mongolian plains lays completely depopulated. Colourful multi-story apartment blocks defile the skyline as workers remain content with their own meagre living arrangements. These ghost towns represent the fight back, the refusal of workers to become entirely immersed within a corporate system. With this modicum of independence, they are able to exist as more than just drone-like labourers. Though the film is specifically about a single instance in a single place, it speaks passionately and evocatively about the dehumanising effects of industry the world over. It exists to take everything away from us, to own both our time and our bodies. Whether we're able to fight against it never addressed, but if there is a Devil, then surely there has to be a God. DAVID JENKINS





Theo and Hugo

Directed by OLIVIER DUCASTEL, JACQUES MARTINEAU
Starring GEOFFREY COUËT, FRANÇOIS NAMBOT,
MARIO FANFANI
Released 9 SEPTEMBER

ow's this for a meet cute: two young dudes, Theo (Geoffrey Couët) and Hugo (François Nambot), lock eyes, hearts and everything else besides while wandering around a dungeon-like confines of a gay sex club called L'Impact. When they realise that love might very well be in the air, the house lights flicker on for a brief moment and a bout of intense public lovemaking begins. It's a wonderful opening episode, near-wordless in its execution and as dirty as it is swooningly romantic. The post-coital euphoria of riding hire bikes around the vacant Parisian suburbs at night is shattered when Theo boasts of having been so spellbound that he didn't bother to use a condom. A nervous Hugo explains he's HIV positive and that his new playmate should high-tail it to the nearest emergency room.

The pair's mature, rational response to this tricky situation completely alters the tone of the film, which for a decent stretch works well as an instructive guide to the ins and outs of the healthcare system. It also confirms that they both see their relationship as being built on more than casual sex. Alas, after this impressive first half, the film swiftly falls to pieces, with zero tension or any real sense of direction. Couët and Nambot's loved-up cooing can only hold time for so long, and when writing-directing twosome Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau usher in some adorably charming locals whose job it is to dispel ethnic and gender stereotypes, well, you might want to head for the door. It's a shame, because there's such chemistry, momentum and passion to begin with, that the lacklustre closing furlongs make it come across as even more underpowered and repetitive than it is. Still, both leads give it their all, even if there's not the material to give their performances the dramatic sustenance they deserve. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. The filmmaking duo are behind some of the 21st century's best LGBTQ-themed films.

7

ENJOYMENT.

What a great opening!

3

IN RETROSPECT.

It's downhill after the first half.

Directed by JERRY ROTHWELL, REUBEN ATLAS
Starring LAURENT PONSOT, JAY MCINERNEY, JEF LEVY
Released 16 SEPTEMBER

Sour Grapes

bove a certain price point, they say, you're not paying for the wine, you're paying for the label. When that tag reaches thousands per bottle however, you can argue that rare wines offer a magical connection with terroir and history, but it's still hard to dispel the suspicion it's all an exercise in vinous bling for the super-rich – many of whom are unaware they're shelling out big bucks for elaborate fakes. More fool them, you might think, but this investigative doc probes a little deeper and delivers up a fascinating real-life central character with the two-faced bonhomie and cunning of Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley. When dotcom-boom liquidity slooshed over the wine auction scene, no-one splashed more cash than Rudy Kurniawan, who was tight-lipped about his background, but whose knowledge, generosity and educated palate ingratiated him with the coterie of vintage-collecting high-rollers. It looked like he was stoking up the market to sell on at even higher prices – but his plan was even more fiendish than that...

Indeed, from a not-that-promising set-up, the movie becomes an engrossing procedural, triggered when a top Burgundy wine-maker spots that Kurniawan is selling off his wines from vintages when they weren't actually produced. Soon he's on the case, as the FBI start circling, and the truth of Kurniawan's methods and identity are uncovered – one investigator suggesting his elaborate bluff makes him "a Gen X Great Gatsby". Offering a slickly-shot peek into seriously deluxe lifestyles, the film-makers extract some wry humour from the unfolding chaos, with sundry Hollywood types valiantly refusing to believe they've been duped. In the end, the finger is justifiably pointed at unscrupulous auctioneers, and while Kurniawan ultimately remains an enigmatic figure, his story reminds us that only the master forgers truly understand the greatness of any art form. TREVOR JOHNSTON

ANTICIPATION. Wine-collecting millionaires get conned – and this is a problem?

2

ENJOYMENT. Actually, the unmasking of a master forger makes a pretty good mystery story.

3

IN RETROSPECT. More intriguing than expected, and you'll be gasping for a glass of red afterwards.







Baden Baden

Directed by RACHEL LANG
Starring SALOMÉ RICHARD, CLAUDE GENSAC,
LAZARE GOUSSEAU
Released 23 SEPTEMBER

D espite what its title might suggest, Rachel Lang's *Baden Baden* has little to do with the quaint German spa town. Instead, it is a pun on the word 'bath' – appropriate, as much of the film focuses on guileless free spirit Ana (Salome Richard) and her self-motivated mission to replace her grandmother's tub with a shower.

The film opens with Ana stealing a production company's rented Porsche to drive back to Strasbourg, her hometown. From then on, her summer unfolds in a series of disjointed vignettes. The fragmentary structure requires patience. It's fair to say that it fits the tone of the film, which evokes a languid, aimless summer. Plot elements are introduced with much fanfare, then fade out, never to be mentioned again. There are occasional jarring forays into the surreal featuring a naked Ana wandering through a garden. It's possible that these are supposed to serve as a visual representation of Ana's confusion and vulnerability, but their infrequent appearances mean that their significance remains elusive.

It is a testament to director Lang, however, that she manages to capture the helpless feeling of watching someone you love grow old and deteriorate. And she does this without resorting to senimentalism. This is owed in part to Claude Gensac who excels in the role of Ana's world-weary yet mischievous grandmother. Equally notable are the bathroom scenes featuring Ana and Gregoire, a bemused handyman. It's apparent from the outset that the urgency with which Ana tackles her grandmother's bathroom has little to do with home improvement. The film floats around this symbolic act, a reflection of Ana's attempts to establish some semblance of order in the face of infinite uncertainty. Despite this, the film ends on a note of positivity rather than despair. It says that accepting chaos is sometimes more productive than resisting it. CATHERINE KARELLIS

ANTICIPATION. Seems like a quirky film about summertime ennui.

3

ENJOYMENT. A little self-indulgent at times, but Salome Richard is captivating in the lead.

IN RETROSPECT.

Surprisingly moving - a solid debut from Rachel Lang.

Aloys

Directed by TOBIAS NÖLLE
Starring GEORG FRIEDRICH, TILDE VON OVERBECK,
KAMIL KREJCÍ
Released 23 SEPTEMBER

f sex lines are designed to fuel erotic fantasy for those who have problems with intimacy, then Aloys – a man near-permanently attached by an earpiece to mobile phone or digital recorder – is engaged in his own imaginative exercise of masturbatory indulgence. He is a loner who actively avoids other people. He never meets with either his clients or with the people he observes and records for his work as a detective. Although he does, behind the closed door of his flat, obsessively view the videos he has shot, and of his father, and of various animals. To Aloys, the outside world and other people are best kept at a remove, and the opening shots of Tobias Nölle's feature debut, revealing his apartment devoid of furniture or vital signs (apart from a running tap and an abandoned video camera), are an apt introduction to his insulated life.

On the night of his father's cremation, Aloys passes out drunk on a bus. He awakens to find his camera and nine digital tapes stolen. Not long after, a mysterious blackmailer (Tilde von Overbeck) calls, and tells him about "phone-walking... invented in 1984 by a Japanese neurologist... for shy men." Aloys works out who the caller is, but not before her voice and words have taken hold of his imagination, and he has started fantasising a wholly different life - of excursions, parties, friendship and more. If Aloys has the habit of referring to himself in the first person plural, that is because he is an extreme introvert caught at an intersection between reality and fiction. While his telephonic partner may be a Dream Girl, she is not of the Manic Pixie variety, but comes with her own very real loneliness and desperation, no matter how much Aloys may idealise her. Much of Nölle's film is shot wide, inviting us either to observe its chimerical imagery from a distance, or to try to get in close, even at the risk of pain. It is a modern fable of alienation, full of sadness and hope for a better, more connected existence. ANTON BITEL

ANTICIPATION.

Always love a 'muttering man' movie.

3

ENJOYMENT. A sensual journey of discovery through the inner mindscapes of an alienated solipsist.



IN RETROSPECT. Austere yet fanciful, it is a haunting vision of loneliness and escape.





Ingrid Bergman: In Her Own Words

Directed by
STIG BJÖRKMAN
Released
12 AUGUST



ANTICIPATION.

"When I look back on my life, what will I see?"



ENJOYMENT.

"I was the shyest creature in the world but I had a lion inside me that wouldn't keep quiet."



IN RETROSPECT.

"I belong to this make-believe world of film and theatre. I never want to leave it." ast night a man at dinner said to me, 'You'll never be an actress. You're too tall'." Ingrid Bergman wrote this in her diary in 1939. "I thought, he knows nothing about me." Shortly after this disclosure in *Ingrid Bergman:* In Her Own Words, we see footage from her first screen test for David O Selznik. The young actress sits on a couch, looking relaxed as she glances around and smiles, and then she composes herself and stares directly into the camera, delivering a piercing gaze that has a heart-stopping impact. If the man who sat next to her at dinner had seen this footage, he would have been forced to immediately eat his words. She was clearly born to be a movie star.

Stig Björkman's documentary is more about the woman than the movie star, however. Drawing on her diary entries and letters (read with a great depth of feeling by Swedish star du jour Alicia Vikander), he has skilfully assembled a touching and intimate portrait of a restless spirit who followed her heart's desire. "I have a bird of passage inside me, always wanting more, desperate to flex its wings," she once said, and so she pursued every opportunity for artistic and romantic fulfilment, with her children sometimes appearing to be an afterthought. The film focuses primarily on this relationship, as Bergman's offspring recall their childhood upheaval and the fleeting moments of happiness they would enjoy together after months apart. Daughter Isabella Rossellini was even thankful that she underwent an operation for scoliosis when she was 11 years old because her mother finally took time off to take care of her.

Bergman's writing shows her to be strikingly independent and self-possessed, firm in her convictions and unshaken by the doubts of others. We shouldn't forget just how bold she was to leave behind a comfortable American career to make the film *Stromboli* with Roberto Rossellini ("If Hollywood could see me now!" she wrote with glee). Or how unflappable she was when her affair with the Italian director whipped up a ludicrous scandal that made her a US exile for seven years. If she had any regrets, she never showed them; in fact, when an interviewer asked her this question she simply replied, "I regret the things I didn't do, not what I did."

At 114 minutes, Ingrid Bergman: In Her Own Words can be a little monotone (Michael Nyman's recycled score doesn't help in this regard), and the late contributions from Sigourney Weaver and Liv Ullmann feel out of place, but the film is never less than engaging and it is a treasure trove of wonderful images. Pia Lindström says her mother's greatest love affair was with the camera, and that's borne out by how radiant she looks throughout. From playing with her family in home movies to larking about on the set of Joan of Arc; from the young ingénue on Selznik's couch to the aged woman in Ingmar Bergman's Autumn Sonata - she was a uniquely captivating presence. In a touching revelation, Ingrid recalls a moment of insecurity when Ingmar Bergman asked her to appear without makeup in Autumn Sonata, fearing that the reality of her 63-year-old face might deter her fans. "Don't worry" her director replied, "I'll get you new ones". This film might just do the same. PHIL CONCANNON



Hunt For the Wilderpeople

Directed by
TAIKA WAITITI
Starring
SAM NEILL
JULIAN DENNISON
RIMA TE WIATA
Released
16 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

Loved What We Do in The Shadows.



ENJOYMENT.

Sweetly subversive, if slight.



IN RETROSPECT.

Waititi's film-savvy book adaptation is a low-key winner.

efore his death in 1996, Barry Crump had written 24 semi-autobiographical comic novels drawn from a life spent chiefly in the New Zealand bush. Now, Taika Waititi, the director of 2007's Eagle Vs Shark and 2010's Boy, has adapted one of those novels, 'Wild Pork and Watercress', for the big screen. The results are a charming merger of the literary and the cinematic.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople tells the story of 10-year-old Maori orphan Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison) who, following the sudden death of his loving Auntie Bella Faulkner (Rima Te Wiata), goes on the run with his Uncle Hec (Sam Neill), a gruff, grumpy bushman now suspected of abduction and perversion. This episodic, picaresque tale is formally divided, like Crump's novel, into 11 numbered and headed chapters. Within this decidedly bookish frame, books and reading play a key part. Hec's illiteracy and disdain for even the spoken word are offset by Ricky's love of books and his chatterbox tendencies. The film's title derives from an article on Wildebeest that Ricky peruses in a hut where the two fugitives briefly stop. At night, by the campfire, Ricky reads books aloud to Hec, gradually teaching him to love written stories. Hec then teaches Ricky "the knack" of bush survival and self-sufficiency. It is a decidedly literary landscape.

Yet from the opening aerial spectacle of the North Island's vast forested mountains, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* is also highly cinematic. Not only does it race through a variety of recognisable screen genres (Boy's Own adventure, buddy

movie, coming-of-age, the western, police chase flick), but there are also explicit post-Crumpian allusions to such diverse films as Crocodile Dundee, Psycho, Rambo, Transformers, The Terminator, Scarface and Lord of the Rings - with only the latter having any obvious New Zealand connections. Ricky fancies himself a hip-hop gangsta (and names his pet dog Tupac), while social worker Paula (Rachel House) insistently and absurdly appropriates the tough-guy mannerisms of Hollywood's cops and even Marines. Yet while these characters seek to define themselves by all-American models, their quest for identity - a stock theme in rite of passage stories - will take them deep into the hinterlands of Te Urewera. From this there will emerge a film as uniquely indigenous as the supposedly extinct huia bird that Ricky and Hec rediscover in a "majestical" spot.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a fun, funny family yarn. Waititi himself cameos as a local church minister preaching the 'tricky' ways of Jesus, while Rhys Darby, after stealing the show as deputy cultural attaché/band manager Murray Hewitt in TV's Flight of the Conchords, and as werewolf 'alpha dog' Anton in Waititi's own What We Do In The Shadows, does it again here as loner conspiracy theorist 'Psycho' Sam. There may be an inevitability to the way in which Hec and Ricky, for all their differences and dysfunction, eventually grow together, but a rich seam of subversive humour stops the sentiment becoming too treacly. ANTON BITEL



Little Men

Directed by
IRA SACHS
Starring
GREG KINNEAR
THEO TAPLITZ
MICHAEL BARBIERI
Released
23 SEPTEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

Ira Sachs really found his voice with Love is Strange, hopefully it wasn't a one-off.



ENJOYMENT.

If anything, this is even better, turning everyday happenings into a micro-epic about the making of masculinity.



IN RETROSPECT.

The film's sheer delicacy exerts a continuing fascination.

e's been making features for 20 years, but it seemed that with *Love is Strange*, Memphisborn, New York-based writer-director Ira Sachs reached critical mass. Arthouse audiences really responded to lovely old gay couple John Lithgow and Alfred Molina as they were suddenly cast adrift on the Manhattan property market. Yet the film had so much more to offer, not least a tantalising portrait of friendship between two inseparable teenage boys. Parents, needless to say, jumped to conclusions about their sexuality, though Sachs, himself openly gay, did not – refusing to overdelineate the specifics of the abiding connection between them.

As it happens, all that was but a trial run for this latest offering, which, if anything, delivers an even more diaphanous portrayal of formative maleness, featuring an adolescent duo whose relationship is again tricky to define. Moreover, since property values are indeed the international language of the middle classes, Sachs uses a saga about Brooklyn gentrification as a sort of bourgeois lure, conjuring up a scenario where nice couple Greg Kinnear (as an struggling off-off-Broadway actor) and Jennifer Ehle (a therapist who's the real breadwinner) inherit a flat which comes with a retail unit below - currently occupied by a kindly Chilean dressmaker (Paulina Garcia) whose rather generous lease is about to expire. Conflict is looming, but that doesn't stop the two same-age boys from upstairs and downstairs instantly hitting it off. Kinnear's shy, arty son (Theo Taplitz) comes out of his shell around his outgoing Hispanic neighbour (Michael Barbieri), who in turn values the former's advice given his aspirations to attend a prestigious performing arts school.

Somebody somewhere will no doubt use the term 'bromance' to describe what passes between them. but that's crassly wide of the mark. In a seemingly curious reference point, Sachs nicks a plot device from Yasujiro Ozu's silent classic I was Born, But..., having the two kids here also take a vow of silence in response to sharpening hostilities between the parents. In fact,, Ozu's portrait of naughty scamps at their most carefree is duly relevant, since Little Men captures its subject at a point just before they lose an innocent receptivity to all that's beautiful in this world and enter the adult realm of sexual anxiety and, well, stuff like bickering over rental values. Done badly, all this could play like a tired middle-aged fake take on glorious youth, but Sachs summons up a chaste sincerity that's somehow achingly free of cynicism. He's cast wonderfully well, Taplitz's foal-like fragility playing right off against Barbieri's Travolta swaggerin-the-making, and the shots of them gliding through the streets on roller blades are almost dream-like in their intensity, capturing a moment that's soon going to slip through time's fingers.

A word too for America's most underrated actor, Greg Kinnear, who puts in a towering performance as the loving father, so mired in the bottomless disappointment of his own mediocre life, that it indelibly taints his advice to his son, who really needs inspiring positivity rather than dire warnings. Yes, life is complicated, love is strange, but what's so affecting about Sachs's film is its ultimate belief that the kids will, somehow, be all right. TREVOR JOHNSTON



The Little Men director on indie cinema, Ozu and climbing mountains.

ollowing on from his story of a middle age gay couple's forcible separation by housing issues, New York local Ira Sachs discusses how he came up with the idea for a contemporary drama based on a Japanese movie from the 1950s

LWLies: Is Little Men a film made for kids? Sachs: That's exactly the kind of film I wanted to make: a mature film about childhood which also explored the pleasures of cinema. There's an absence, and it's interesting, as what you're talking about is the very conundrum of capitalism. I've begun to think that the film is a metaphor for the place that personal cinema has in our industry. A store front represents the last woman standing. In a way, it reveals that this system doesn't work any more.

Are the people who are funding independent cinema dying out? I like to be blunt and realistic, which I think has partially been how I've been able to sustain a career as a filmmaker. I am someone who takes money

quite seriously, and I would say that the numbers don't work. And yet, we still make these things and they still find their audience. For me a film like *Kes* is the inspiration. It was an extraordinarily important film for me when I first saw it. Would that film be made today? With what money? And who would its audience be? I'm curious to know.

CINEMA FEELS MUCH MORE SHORT TERM NOW. FILMS COME AND GO SO QUICKLY. I'm not a nostalgic person, but what has happened in the age of Netflix is that they are buying films and releasing them in a way where the idea of an opening weekend is no longer a thing. These films just appear, they just exist. There's no moment where they mark the cultural space. They just appear internationally. Which was a possibility for this film if we had gone in that direction. It has been interesting to watch. It's killing the local distribution and exhibition systems. It's globalisation in another form. And yet, I think we have to hope that some films will last. I've been showing my kids Buster Keaton. Looney Tunes is still possible.

this feels like a small film considering its very minor-scale subject matter. I would say that it's a precise film. Maybe it's an attentive film? Again, you don't have to be loud to be big. If you are able to be deep, then you talk about very big things even if the scale of the story is small. It's not a melodrama, it's just plain drama. Melodrama enlarges things, but it doesn't make them better. I'm inspired by filmmakers such as Ozu and Loach and Satyajit Ray and Maurice Pialat. They are filmmakers who believe in the individual's story.

In the production and the writing, do you feel that you have a similar experience with each film? This is the third film I've written with Mauricio Zacharias, and there's a process we've come to that has been quite similar. We get together and we talk about movies and we talk about our lives. We talk about the stories we want to tell. For this film, we went back to Ozu, particularly the two films *Good Morning* and I Was Born, But... which were both films that he made about kids who go on strike. That became a backbone for our narrative. Then we had to ask why our kids would go on strike, and we discovered that Mauricio's family in Rio are involved in a prolonged eviction process with a tenant. Every time he'd come in and tell me something new. It was clear to me that it was a really raw and resonant story, and there were two sides to it.

Do you have lots of ideas on the go at once, or do you approach each new film from scratch? I'm a child of Montessori, which means you approach each thing on its own in a very orderly fashion. So, I don't have a drawer full of stories. For a year-and-a-half I've been working on a film about Montgomery Clift for HBO. And we're also starting conversations about a new feature inspired by an obscure Satyajit Ray film called Kanchenjungha from 1962 about a family walking up a mountain. It covers three generations, it begins at the bottom and it ends at the top, and there's a decision that needs to be made through the course of the climb. It's a great structure. I think it's going to be a very Shakespearean storyline. It's very theatrically contained. I'm very excited 🚱









Fedora

Directed by BILLY WILDER	1978
Starring WILLIAM HOLDEN	Released 19 SEPT
MARTHE KELLER HILDEGARD KNEF	Blu-ray

ime is cruel to some movies and kinder to others. Billy Wilder remains a household name for having helmed such beloved comedies as Some Like it Hot and The Apartment. But with the gift of hindsight, it seems that it was during his twilight years that he produced some of his most complex and affecting works of cinema. 1978's Fedora is his penultimate feature, and undoubtably his last great one (his 1981 swansong, Buddy Buddy, is... not one of his finest). It was largely dismissed upon release as being too fuddy-duddy and seemingly channeling the interests and fashions of a bygone era. Yet it now stands defiant as a latter-day partner piece to Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo - a cockamamie detective saga which conceals a heartbreaking and subversive discussion on identity, stardom, doubles and the tragedy of undying love. The mysterious Fedora (Marthe Keller) is a Dietrich-like screen goddess who has shunned the limelight at the height of her powers to live out her days in the seclusion of a mansion in Corfu. William Holden's two-bit independent producer has gambled his livelihood on bringing her back to the screen, but his efforts are rebuffed with a vengeance. Can someone just stop being a movie star? He thinks not. It's a film about the expedited half-life of celebrity, and the impossibility of remaining the person the public originally fell in love with for any meaningful amount of time. The plot pivots on a central twist which, like Vertigo, proves rich and edifying if you're willing to overlook some mild logistical inconsistencies. Rescued and resuscitated by Masters of Cinema, this new Blu-ray edition will hopefully bolster the film's reputation. It's a masterpiece that, if Wilder's name hadn't been on the credits, you might think it had been directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. DAVID JENKINS

The Hills Have Eyes

Directed by WES CRAVEN	1977
Starring PETER LOCKE	Released 26 SEPT
JAMES WHITWORTH MICHAEL BERRYMAN	Blu-ray

he claustrophobia of wide open spaces is key to the horror of Wes Craven's 1977 sand shocker, The Hills Have Eyes. An unabashed homage to Tobe Hooper's canonical The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, the film sees a whitebread southern family total their RV in an unforgiving stretch of desert and then slowly succumb to the terrorising feral marauders who have stationed themselves in the surrounding hills. As with Hooper's film, there is a certain glee to be had from observing as the various members of the Carter clan are ravaged and abused. Despite a surface level goodness, they do come across as a mobile artillery unit, fully tooled-up with firearms and guard dogs lest anyone attempts to give them trouble. Yet their top-heavy defence arsenal proves no match for the patient, deadly brood of hirsute cannibals who are happy to bide their time before picking the Carters off one by one and placing their corpses in the cooking pot. The film is a brash satire on nuclear testing, as the killers are said to be the result of the tests carried out at a nearby military base. Yet this is little more than an excuse to paint them as wild-eyed killers who will plumb the very depths of depravity to ensure their survival. This 4K restoration arrives on Blu-ray care of Arrow Films, and is bundled with their customary array of context-supplying extras, including audio commentaries, interviews, and a 2003 making of documentary. Though it was made on a relatively low budget, there's a noticeable precision to the filmmaking, especially the clever ways that Craven uses day and night to conceal the watchers. Some of the most effective shots are just of characters creeping through the darkness trying to determine where the guttural yelps in the middle distance are coming from. DAVID JENKINS









Raising Cain

Directed by BRIAN DE PALMA	1992
Starring JOHN LITHGOW	Released 12 SEPT
LOLITA DAVIDOVICH STEVEN BAUER	Blu-ray

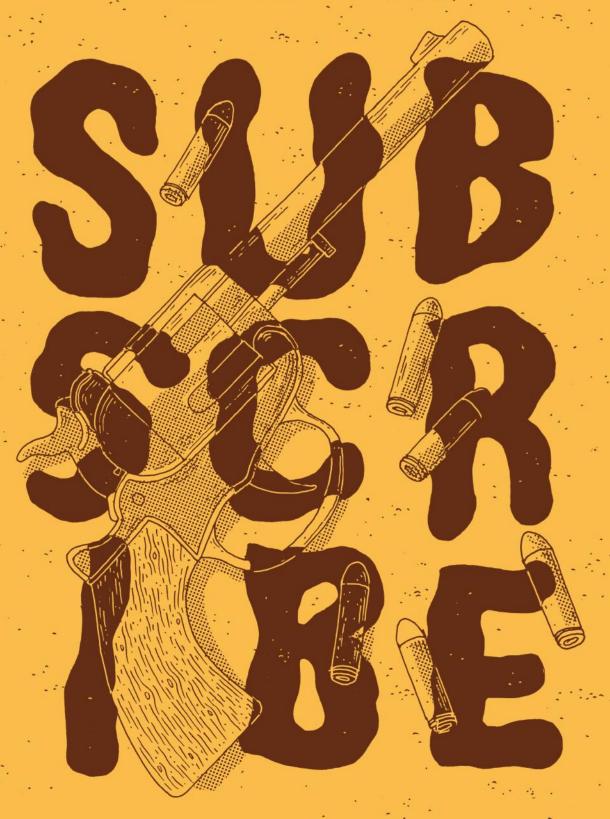
e don't give the actor John Lithgow the respect he deserves. He's been the double shot of hard liquor that's made any number of bland cocktails more complex and more palatable. 1992's Raising Cain may still stand as one of the greatest showcases for his manifold talents as a performer, allowing him to bring everything to the table as a lunatic child psychologist with a multiple personality disorder. Director Brian De Palma takes the nutty material seriously enough to build up a sense of baseline dread, but this is really all about teeing up situations that require Lithgow to haul his wacky ass in front of the camera. The opening scene set things up nicely: Lithgow's Carter Nix is sat smiling in a town car as it putters through a leafy suburb, a female friend in the driver's seat and two toddlers belted in the back. He asks her if he can borrow her children for an important psychological experiment. He appears good natured, intelligent and thoughtful, but within the space of about three minutes he transforms into a murderous psychopath, goaded on by his shade-wearing alter ego Cain. Lithgow's Cain comes across as a modern riff on Anthony Perkins' Norman Bates in Psycho, replete with cross-dressing, a predilection for dumping cars in lakes, and cod psychological reasoning for his erratic behaviour. De Palma is a director who wants viewers to take notice of the craft of making a movie, and this one serves as his ode to the flexibility of actors and the way the camera is able to trick you into seeing the same person in a number of different ways. Some may find the film somewhat slight, especially when placed next to the director's golden greats, but this is a frisky and eccentric little number that is a colourful fragment of the whole De Palma puzzle. DAVID JENKINS

The Glass Shield

Directed by CHARLES BURNETT	1994
Starring MICHAEL BOATMAN	Released 24 OCT
LORI PETTY ERICH ANDERSON	DVD

A-based director Charles Burnett is largely known for his lyrical, independently-funded dramas which chronicle the daily toils of black working class life in America. Yet even when he's working within a rigid genre template - in the case of 1994's The Glass Shield, it's a crooked cop procedural - he's still able to address the stigma of skin colour in the workplace. Michael Boatman's rookie LA cop JJ Johnson is fast-tracked to the sheriff's office on the back of an affirmative action programme and is able to spy the internal rot from day one. But Johnson isn't a straight-shooting entry point into this suppurating snake pit - he plays the game, wanting to get along and impress his crooked white colleagues. The decision to tell a white lie under oath leads to the possibility of a petty thug getting the death penalty. It's okay, though, because he's hoodlum trash and needs to be taken out. Yet Johnson slowly discovers that he's a just a single cog in a vast machinery of corruption. Burnett never allows this to turn into a melodramatic crusade movie, as Johnson and a similarly persecuted Jewish officer, Fields (Lori Petty), have to account for personal safety before blowing the whistle. The story is inspired by real occasions where innocent black men were ushered in as scapegoats for white collar criminals, all masterminded by a secret coterie of high-ranking officers. What makes this film stand out is how it cuts through the potential hysteria by training its focus tightly on questions of ethics, peer pressure, personal choice and how it's impossible to be just a little corrupt - once you're in, it's all or nothing. This new BFI DVD offers a welcome glance at a director working in a slightly different register than most fans will be used to. DAVID JENKINS

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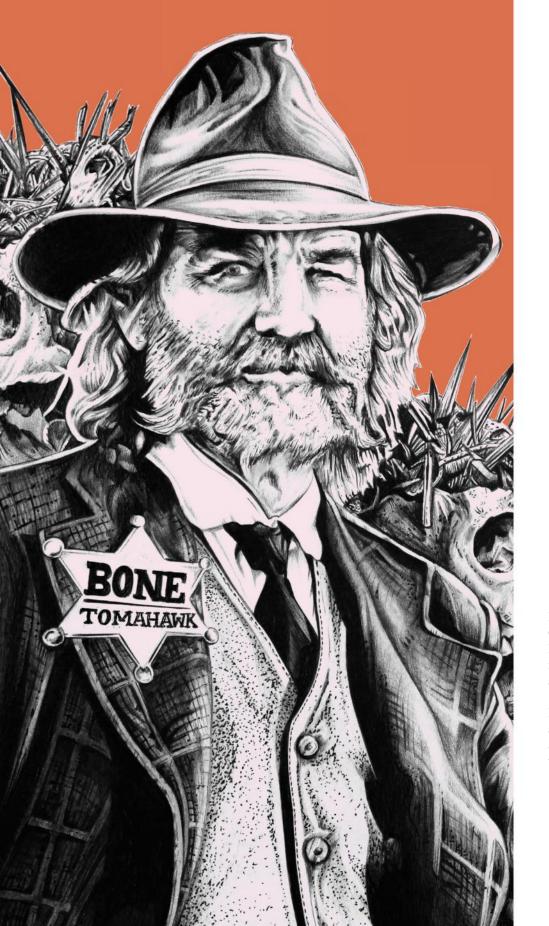
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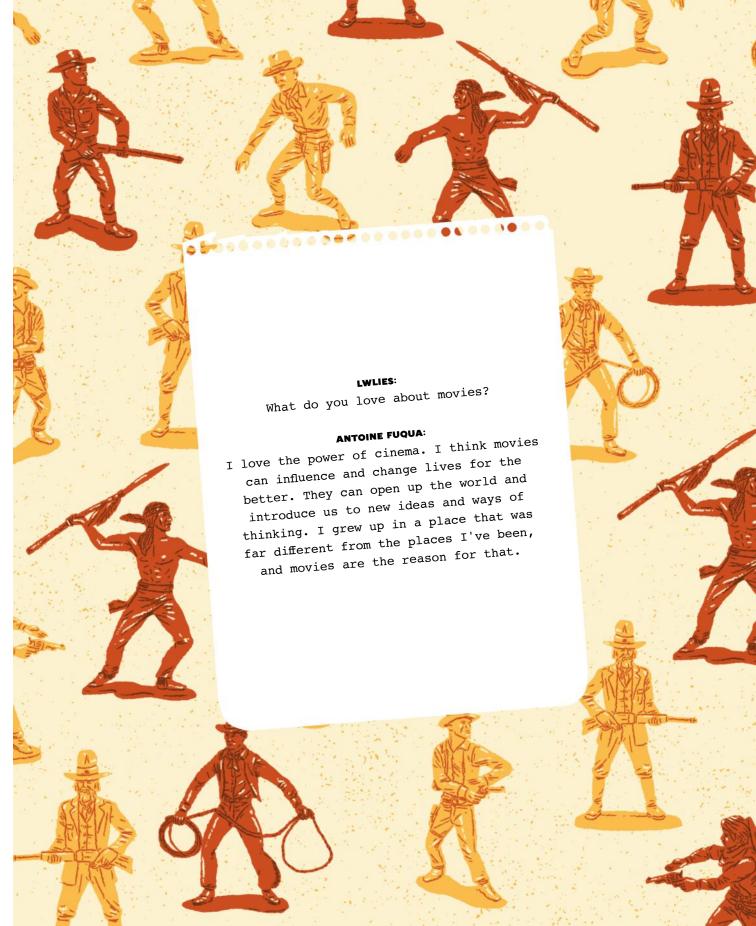


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